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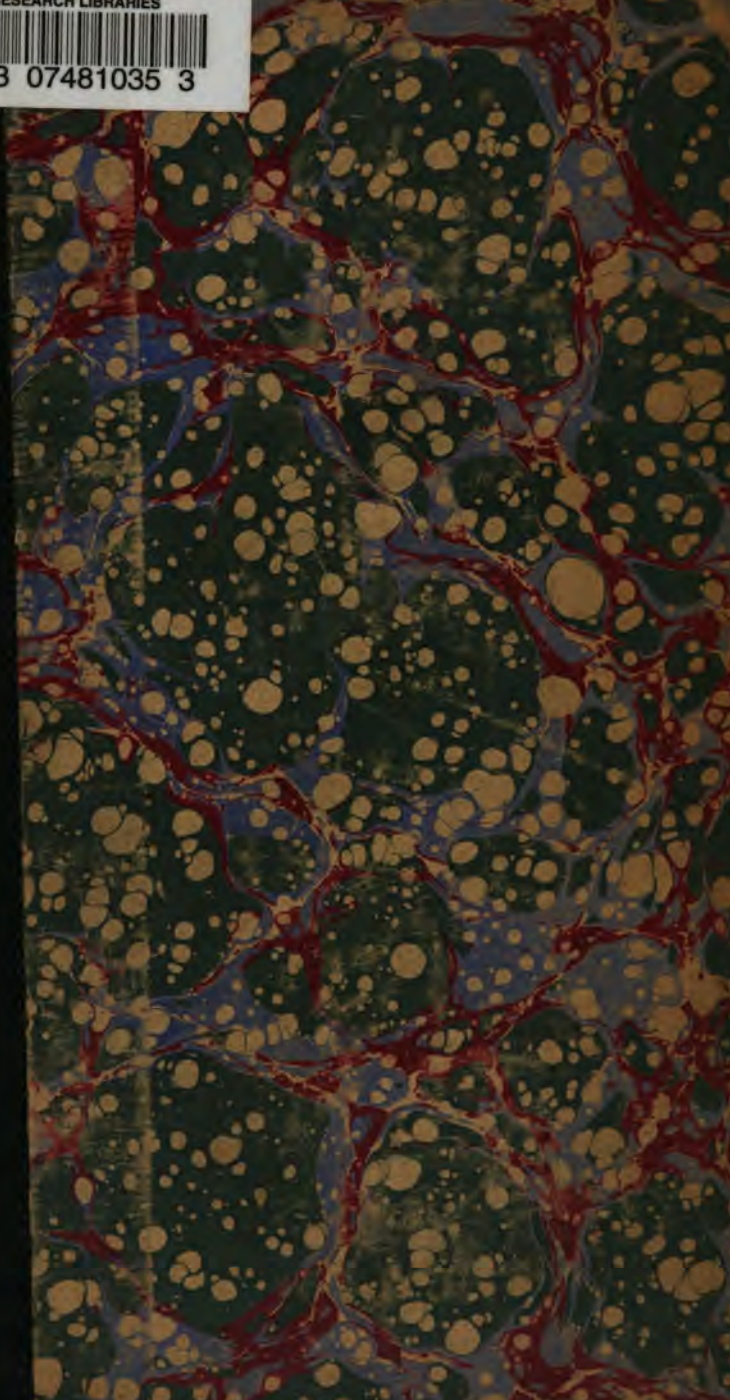
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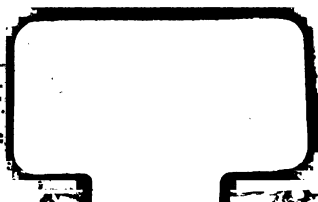
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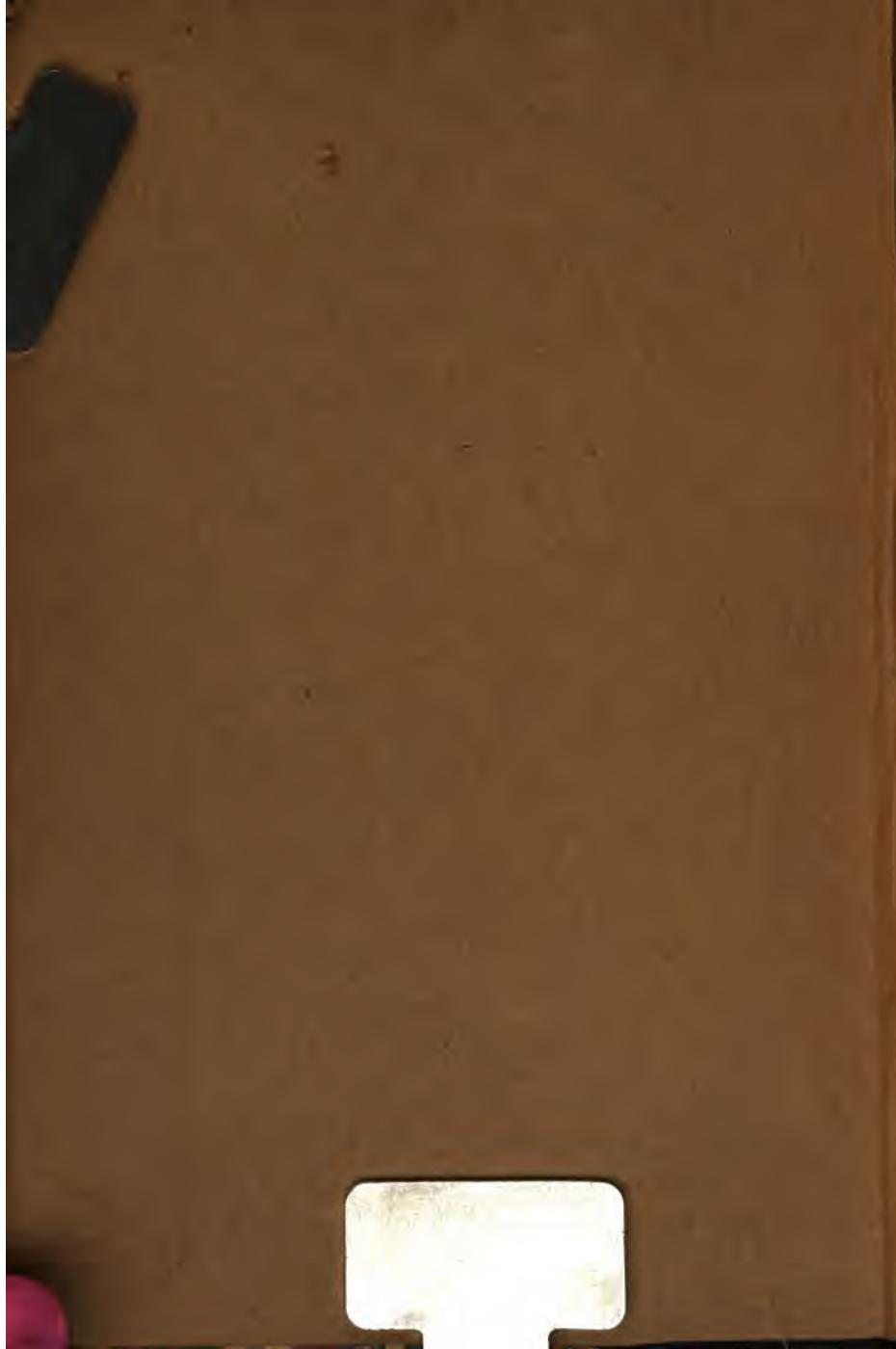
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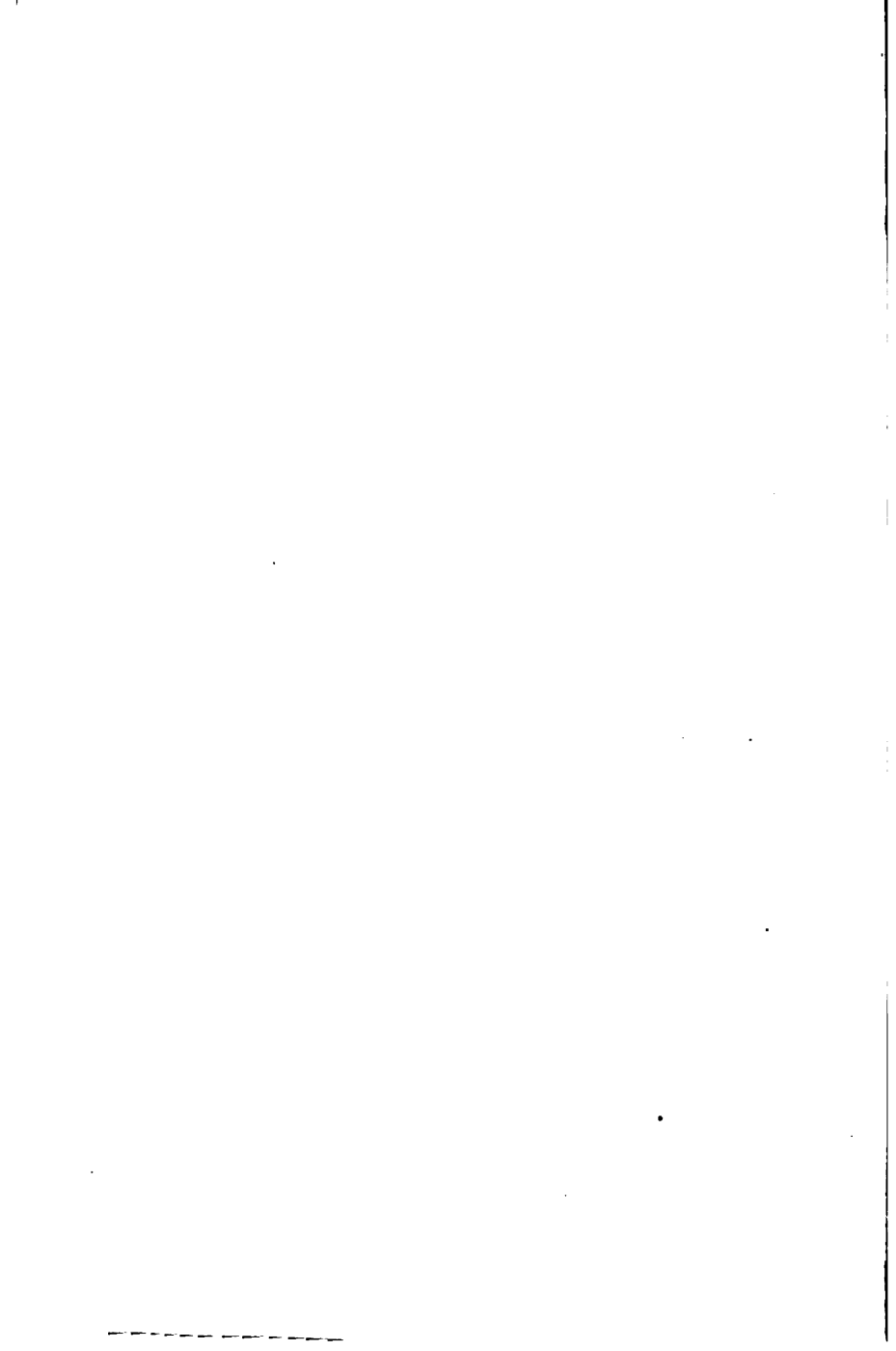


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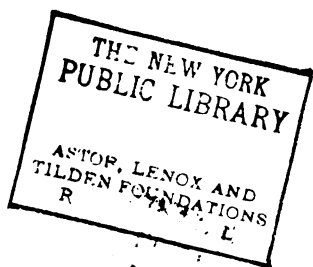
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**THE
GREATER PUNISHMENT**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE VANISHING SMUGGLER
WHEN LOVE CALLS MEN TO ARMS
A PRINCE OF ROMANCE
THE TRAIL OF A TENDERFOOT
FOOTLOOSE AND FREE
THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN
THE PENNY PIPER OF SARANAC
ENCHANTED CIGARETTES



7



“‘You will stand there and not move,’ said the Highland policeman, suddenly blinding me with the full glare of the bull’s-eye . . .”

THE GREATER PUNISHMENT

BY
STEPHEN CHALMERS

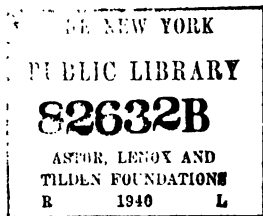
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FRONTISPIECE
BY
RALPH PALLAN COLEMAN

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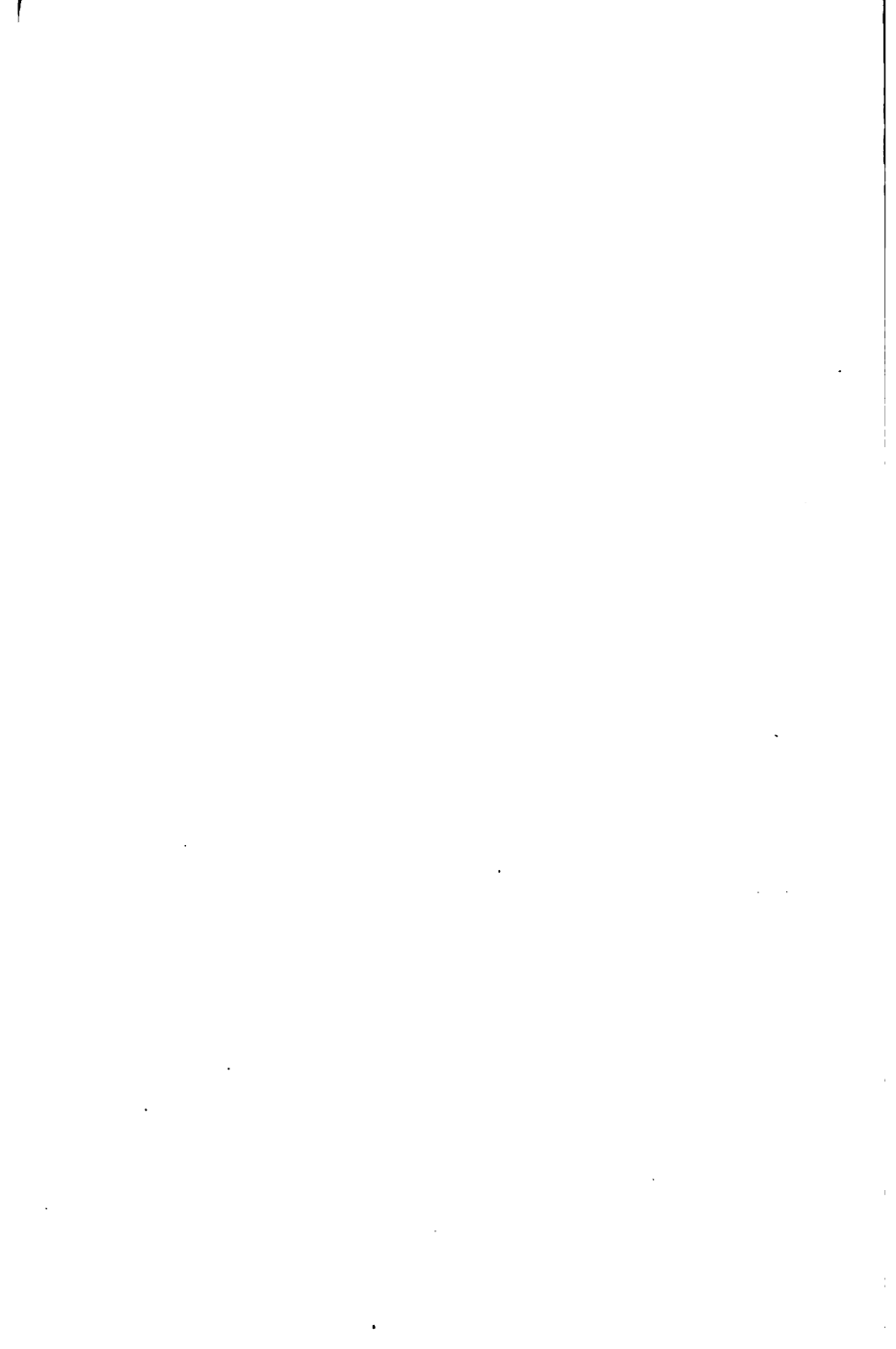
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TO
WALTER H. CLUETT

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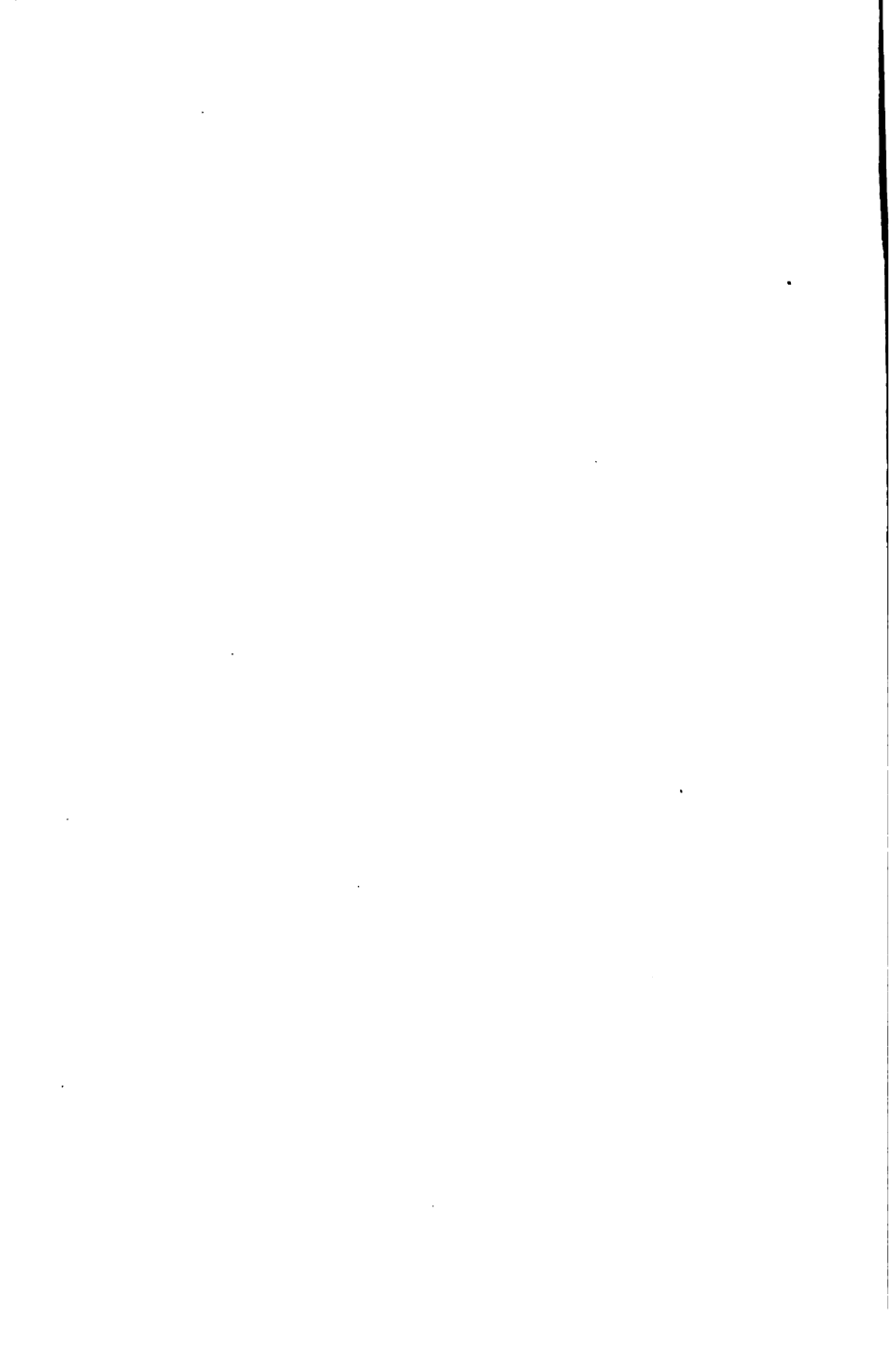


"And Cain saith unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from Thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and . . . every one that findeth me shall slay me."

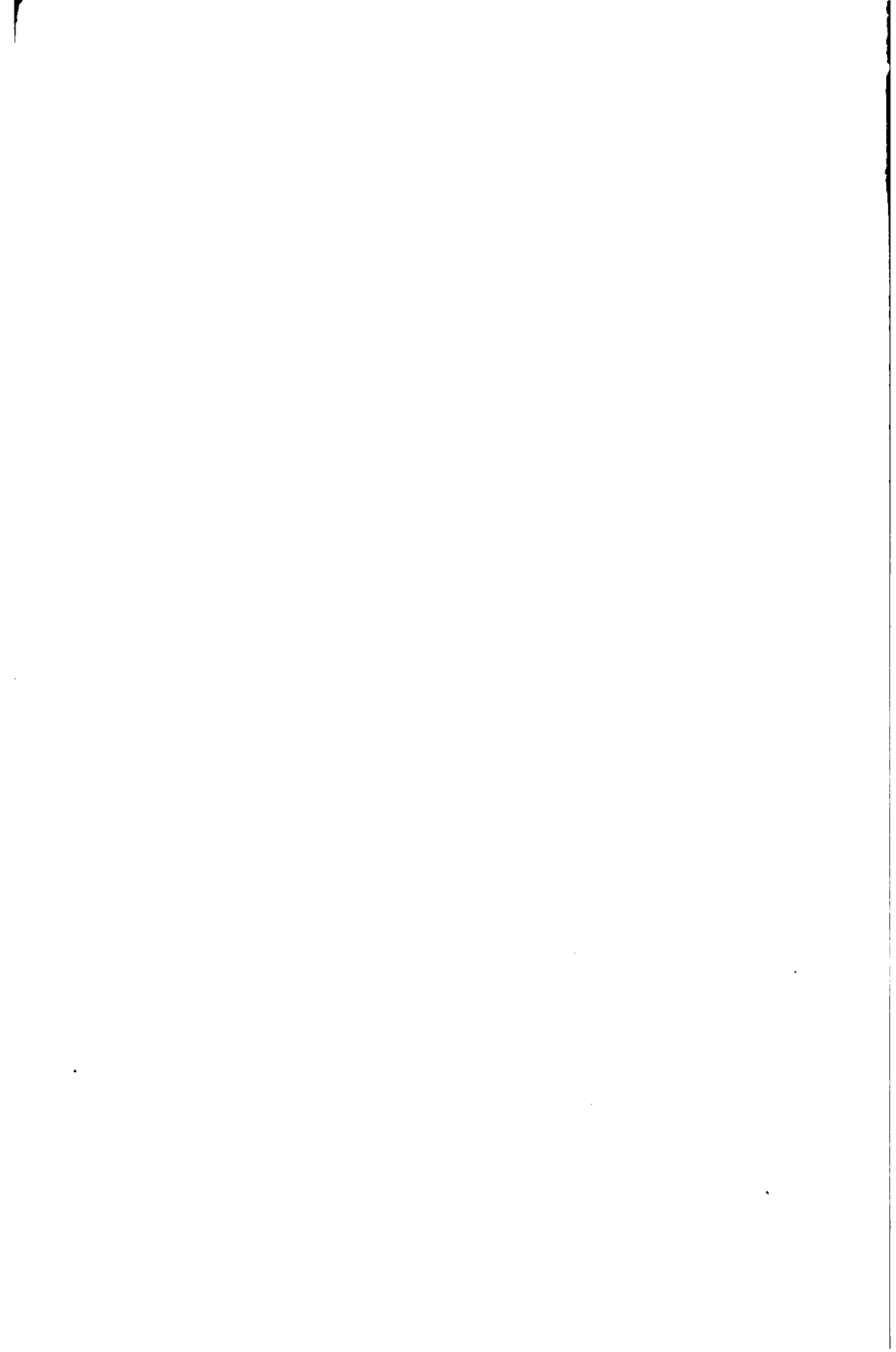
—GENESIS IV, 13, 14

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**THE
GREATER PUNISHMENT**



THE GREATER PUNISHMENT

CHAPTER I

THE SPENDTHRIFT

MY CHRISTIAN name is John. What my surname may be, save that it is of high honour among men, as my father made it, shall not appear in this narrative.

Also, I warn the many who may read this that, no matter how readily they may penetrate the veneer of fiction and perceive the truth herein, no mental or physical effort will avail to establish my identity or that of the other figures who moved in the strange drama. They may search all Glasgow for that blind alley and the silent house where Daniel Bunthorne lived; they may delve into the criminal annals of Scotland and possibly find a case similar to that of the trial of John Sheffield, *alias* "Captain Kettle," for the murder of Joe Byrnes, *alias* "Shylock" Smith; and they may imagine that at last they have the solution of the mystery of the sinister Mr. Jeremy.

But the power that enmeshed me in its far-reaching tentacles conducts its affairs with a discretion peculiarly its own. When I have finished my unaccustomed task of writing narrative the links

connecting the affair may seem clear enough and the truth of what I shall have set down appear beyond question; but I shall not have betrayed any one. The identity and peace of those who were involved in what I can consider a most remarkable human tragedy will remain covered and undisturbed.

I begin my story at the time of my twenty-first birthday. My father was one of the merchant princes of Glasgow. He had risen to wealth and commercial eminence upon an original capital of sixpence as he liked to remind me in his sarcastic moments.

My mother was an old-fashioned Scottish gentlewoman with a quaint north-country accent which she never lost. From her I acquired certain tastes which, as is not infrequently the case, the father revered in the wife but despised in the son. I had some fondness for, and accomplishment in, music, much to my father's disgust; I could paint, which in his eyes constituted something worse than "an honest crime"; and I loved light and colour, a failing which, he maintained, was a natural attribute of the *avis* "popinjay."

I have drawn my father in rather severe lines. In justice to him I will outline myself as he, no doubt, saw me.

I spent his money freely, thoughtlessly. I passed through Edinburgh University with a little less than scholarly honour, and survived the test of another kind by a mere fluke. I made a pretence of work in his Mitchell Street offices—he had made a fortune in jute—paying no attention to anything that was

not thrust under my nose, and exerting only a passing interest then. My evenings—nights, often—I spent where the lights were brightest and the allurements of life keenest. Money meant nothing to me. I had never had to work for it. When the current medium of immediate exchange failed in my pocket, I charged life to account.

There were remittent financial crises in my affairs, but they did not worry me. Each crisis meant a storm in the study of a certain urban mansion, where an irate father thundered anathema on a long-suffering, but patient, son.

Always the accumulated bills were paid. There followed a week of severity on one side and subtle discretion on the other; then the drift began again. It is an old story, of course, and one that has either no definite finish or a very abrupt one. My father decided upon the latter ending as being practical.

It was my twenty-first birthday. I came home for dinner as a matter of sentiment. My mother came to greet me in the lobby. At once I saw that she was disturbed. She was dressed in my honour with extreme, old-fashioned care, which did not hide a certain redness about her eyes and a droop to her kindly mouth. She came forward swiftly and laid her hands upon my shoulders before I could remove my cloak.

Even as she did so, the dinner signal sounded.

"Ye are just in time, John," said she. "I'm glad that ye didna keep him waiting. And oh, lad, ye will be careful of him this night. There's a something in his e'e that——"

An inner door opened and my father appeared. For a moment he surveyed my mother and I, a grim smile hovering about his broad, dour face. My mother's hands dropped and she turned respectfully to him.

"Is that the prodigal son?" said he, in his roughly sarcastic way. "His watch must be a bit fast the night. Mother, ye might take his hat and gloves for him and his wee bit cane. Ye should see a doctor, Jack, about they rheumatics. It's not natural for a man o' twenty-one to be haudin' himself up wi' a stick!"

He led the way into the dining room and glowered from the head of the table as I held a chair for my mother.

"He's that gallant, too!" he almost jeered.

I had heard the comment so often that I paid no attention. As I took my own seat and lifted my napkin, I found under the latter a silver sixpenny piece with a hole in it.

"I've always said, John," said my father with a kind of mock affection in his tone, "that when ye came to years o' discretion I'd give ye a sixpence for yourself. I could surely do no less by ye on this auspicious occasion than my father did by me."

"I was under the impression," I remarked, "that you were ten years old when you acquired the famous sixpence."

"Ay," said my father, very dryly; "but then, ye see, I was twenty-one when I was ten, not ten when I was twenty-one."

"True, sir—true," I murmured, quite unhurt.

His jeer became more pronounced as he went on. I caught a half-pleading, half-warning glance from my poor mother.

"Ye'll observe that I picked out a sixpence with a wee hole in it, John," said he, ponderously. "I was thinking that now ye have ceased to be an infant—that is, in the eyes of the law; now that ye have reached years o' discretion; become a man—in a manner o' speaking—and put away childish things, ye might want to hing it on your gold watch-chain. But I'll not interfere. Ye can do as ye please wi' that sixpence, John. But if it burns a hole in your pooch, take the advice o' a man o' sound commercial experience: Dinna spend it a' in one shop."

I made a pretence of carefully examining the little silver coin.

"It's a beautiful sixpence," I said, "one of the most beautiful sixpences I have ever seen. They don't make sixpences like that nowadays."

Again my mother shot her pleading, warning glance.

"It's a blessing they made at least one of them in my day," said my father. "In fact, John, I wadna be surprised if that's the very same sixpence. However, ye can have the mill, John. I'll content me with the grist it brought."

He raised a glass of wine and glowered at me over the rim.

"Well, here's to the day, John. It's been a long time coming."

For the life of me I could not comprehend his attitude. As my mother had said, there was some-

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thing in his eye that, as she had probably meant to add, spelled omen. The rest of the dinner passed in comparative silence. When the butler brought the coffee my father bade him take it into the "study," as he called his lounging, smoking, and reading retreat.

"Come awa' in, John," said he, still with that assumption of humour and paternal affection. "Mary," he added to my mother, "ye'll not miss us, will ye? John and me's going to have a crack."

In the study, my father settled himself in his customary comfortable chair between the big table and the fire. As a matter of habit I dropped into another chair on the opposite side of the table—the table over which many a storm had blown in my direction.

He sat in silence, smoking between sips of coffee. I did the same. At last he set down an empty cup and sat up a little rigidly.

"John ———," said he, calling me by my full names. "I have been studying you for twenty-one years. I have come to the conclusion that I can do no more for you than you seem willing to do for yourself. You seem to like independence, and I have come to agree with you that independence is what you need to bring you to your senses. But your idea of independence is really dependence—on my bank account. My idea of a man's independence is dependence on himself."

I said nothing. I was experienced.

"To-day," he resumed, "I got my discharge from paternal obligation. You're of age and supposed to be able to throw away your crutches. As ye don't

seem willing to drop them, I propose to kick them from under ye and see if ye can walk without them."

I studied him. This was a new note. He was not angry. In fact, he was eyeing me in rather a kindly way. But—this was serious. It began to dawn on me that I had piled up my ship in perfectly quiet, clear weather.

He leaned forward and took from a drawer in the table a flat oblong package tied with tape and sealed in places with red wax.

"No," said he, "I'm not going to turn you out with just a sixpence." He tossed the package across the table. "Here's five hundred pounds. Spend it all in the one shop, or not, as ye please; but make sure o' one thing, John ——, ye needna cross my door again until ye find yourself able to pay it back."

It is unnecessary to detail the rest of that interview. He was obdurate; his mind was made up; he had made it up long before and had been living up to this evening when he would hand me five hundred pounds and let me make or mar my own life with it.

One thing operated toward brevity in this interview. I had immediate need of that money. Indeed, I had hoped some birthday gift would be forthcoming that would obviate the remittent storm due in about another week.

He was so calm that perhaps I did not take him quite seriously enough. I was given clearly to understand that I was cut off with five hundred pounds, that he would no longer be responsible for my debts, and that I was to live where and how I pleased, as long as it was not under his roof—at least, until I was

in a position to return the five hundred pounds and still be able to support myself.

Perhaps if I observed a little more discretion than usual, this new phase of the remittent storm would simmer down to the old calm, and the five hundred be forgotten, or considered as a small mark of my coming of age. In fact, the rather grotesque thought occurred that this was his grimly humorous way of making me a memorial gift.

I was even smiling when I met my mother in the lobby. I was preparing to go to the club.

"Oh, John," she whispered, helping me on with my cloak.

"It's all right, mother," said I, laughing. "He gave me five hundred pounds. Many happy returns of the event."

She stared at me unbelievably. Then relief dawned upon her face.

"Oh, laddie," she said, clasping her thin hands tightly over her bosom, "I'm that glad. Ye must try to do better by him, as he's done so well by you. He doesna understand you, nor you him. But ye maun try this time, lad. Promise me, John. Promise me."

"I'll—I'll try, mother," I said, but somehow not meeting her eyes.

Next minute the door closed behind me and I stood in the shadow of the porch, pulling on my gloves.

It occurred to me then for the first time, and with an importance that was momentarily greater than the sense of having five hundred pounds in my

pocket, that the door of my father's house had, in theory, closed upon me for the last time.

I paused in the buttoning of my left glove and stared absently at the glare of the street lamp opposite. At the same time I became aware of the approach of a man along the pavement immediately below me. He had abruptly turned a corner and was coming along at a rapid, nervous pace, despite the fact that he was rather short and inclined to corpulence. He carried a small brief bag and wore his hat with the rim down over his eyes. His chin, heavily bearded, was sunk on his chest. His general appearance was quite at variance with his pace. I could fancy that only a pair of eyes peering from under the lowered hatrim kept him from stumbling over obstacles.

It would be hard to say what, beyond a something unusual, diverted my thoughts from myself to this man. But his present actions quite rivetted my attention.

He stopped just at the foot of the sandstone steps and rapidly glanced ahead, around, and behind him. No one else was in sight. He made a quick survey of the house. Apparently he did not see me in the shadows of the porch. He suddenly dived through the little iron gate which led to the tradesmen's entrance under the stoop. He was immediately engulfed in the gloom of the basement.

I waited, filled with suspicion, but the man reappeared almost immediately.

For a moment I could hardly believe that it was the same. Yet it was he, although there was some

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change about his appearance. He peered over the little gate and along the thoroughfare before he resumed his course at an easier gait. But in that brief moment of reconnoitring I had had a good look at his face, a look by which I should remember him, and I had discovered wherein lay the change.

His cheeks, full but slack, and drooping on each side of a full-lipped, restless mouth, were perfectly clean-shaven. The heavy beard had vanished!

That was the first time I ever saw the man of my destiny.

CHAPTER II

BROKE ON THE WHEEL

WITH more amusement than actual suspicion I watched the man on his further progress. It occurred to me that the false beard could be of little help to disguise such a type. There could be no mistaking his quick, flat-footed gait, the unusual length of his arms, his broad, round shoulders, and the protruding neck and lowered chin. The face which he disguised was probably the least notable thing about him.

I descended to the pavement and set out on foot toward a club which I shall here name "The Rollers." I was not following the mysterious man with the brief bag; indeed, I had already dismissed him as some stray unit of the city's underworld. It just so happened that my way to the club lay more or less as he was travelling.

The mood to walk was upon me. I fell to thinking again about my affairs. I was not such a thoughtless fool as my father declared. My vices—if vices they could be called—were almost negative virtues. I was consistent in them and deliberate in their practice. I could give them up at an hour's notice as, in fact, I was presently to do. Why I had not reformed before was perhaps because I had never

perceived any reason for exerting myself uncomfortably. I had no responsibility in any matter. Had my father appealed to me on this ground I should willingly have shouldered the whole jute business. But my father monopolized responsibility in his business and in his home; hence he made every one his dependent and (unconsciously, no doubt) discouraged all pride of independence in others.

But there is a moral responsibility that comes from within. For my mother's sake it behooved me to mend my ways; for my father's sake it was time that I prepared myself for fitness to carry on his affairs; and for my own sake it was necessary that I establish in my conduct the line between adolescent play and adult purpose.

It grew upon me as I walked through the streets that the time for a change had come. Youth's festive season was drawing to a close: I was come to the New Year's Eve of things: to-morrow was the day of new resolutions and fresh beginning. I was conscious of a glow of virtuous pride in myself. I had promised my mother to do better by my father. More than that, I was resolved to do better by my mother and myself. I was suddenly sick of irresponsibility. To-night I would discharge every obligation I could deal with. They were mostly debts incurred at the Rollers and among the Rollers' set. I calculated that I would have about one hundred pounds left when I had done.

With all my debts liquidated and one hundred pounds, plus new resolutions as assets, what might I not do toward showing my worth?

Alas for good resolutions! When I look back on that hour of glowing virtue I am forced to conclude that my ambition was not so much to make good for the sake of making good, but to tickle my vanity in proving my father mistaken in his son.

I suddenly came to a short stop at a quiet street corner and within the halo of a street lamp. I had not been more than half-conscious of where I was going. In two glances I recognized two facts. First, in my preoccupied mood I had instinctively chosen less-frequented streets in my walk downtown. Second, I was face to face with the short, stout, flat-footed, flabby-cheeked man with the brief bag.

He stood directly in my path, his eyes fixed upon me. His countenance, very pale and with bluish pockets under the eyes, was marked with a mingling of fear, cunning, anger, and defiance. He glanced quickly over my shoulder, then over his own, as if to find assurance that he was not observed. Then he faced me again.

I gripped my cane in readiness to meet some overt attempt. I remembered the false beard, which was probably now reposing inside that leather bag. I wondered what else might be in it. I suspected a blackjack, a set of burglar's tools, with a bottle of oil perhaps, and possibly some nitro-glycerine and maybe a chloroform sponge.

"What do you mean by following me?" the man asked, sharply, but there was an hysterical note in his voice, like the yelp of a dog that would attack if it had the courage.

"You are mistaken," I said. "If I seem to have

followed you it was merely that our ways apparently lay in the same direction."

"Ah! You admit that you noticed me as you came along?"

"If you make a point of it—I did." I was becoming nettled.

"You saw me——?" The end of the question stuck in his throat and his underlip twitched in a peculiar way.

"I did—if you mean what I mean."

He pulled himself together with a visible effort and spoke with the bravery of desperation.

"Was that any reason why you should follow me?"

"Not to me, although I could have made it a perfectly justified excuse for doing so. You see, it was under the stoop of my father's house that you divested yourself of your beard. A man is open to suspicion who finds it necessary to slip into a private area to change his personal appearance."

The man stared at me, his eyes filled with dull misery. Then he swiftly grew antagonistic. His mouth became set and bitter. His grip on the brief bag visibly tightened, and his left fist closed.

"Do you happen to know who I am?" he asked, with remarkable emphasis on the "who."

"Happy to say I don't. I consider it a matter for self-congratulation."

"Ah! Let me assure you that it will be a matter for self-congratulation if you never make my closer acquaintance."

"I am sure of it," I said, lighting a cigarette; "quite sure of it."

I threw away the extinguished match and prepared to pass on. But again he blocked my way.

"Wait!" said he. "Stay right there for—for five minutes."

"I will do nothing of the sort," I said, brushing him aside.

"Suppose I call the police," said he. "I do not wish to, but——"

"No, you don't wish to do anything of the sort, my friend. Suppose I turned the tables on you by suggesting that the constable take a look at the contents of that bag you carry?"

"Wh-what do you mean?" he stammered. I could see his face change colour, even by the dim glow of the cigarette tip.

"The contents might embarrass you—eh? Unless, of course, you slipped the beard into your pocket."

"Ah!" he breathed, and for some reason he seemed relieved.

"I don't know who you are, or what," he said, "but *I* am a perfectly honest man. I may be unfortunate, but I am honest. If you knew me, you might understand that—and sympathize. But—I see you are a gentleman. I did not notice at first. And I—I am constitutionally nervous. You give me your word that you—that you did not intentionally follow me?"

"I can assure you that I did not even know I was in the same street with you."

His expression of relief was almost painful to behold.

"Thank you," he said with a sigh. "Very well."

Will you go first, or shall I? But that is nonsense!" he added, quickly, as if unwilling to arouse further suspicion. "Good-night, sir—good-night. Please pardon my—my stupidity."

He turned on his heels and resumed his queer, flat-footed gait along the street. Toward the next crossing his pace slowed. Directly under the corner street lamp he stopped, looked back, and saw me still standing where he had left me. At that, he went over the crossing in a tangent direction and disappeared up a side street.

It was clearly a move to blind me. No doubt the man lived near by and, being suspicious of my actions and motives, he did not wish to be seen entering his place of residence.

I looked up at the street sign on the lamp at the corner where I stood. It recorded that the name of an apparent blind alley leading in to the right was "Chamber's Close." I made a mental note of it, then continued my way to St. George's Road, where I hailed a hansom.

Fifteen minutes later I was at the Rollers' Club. After discharging a number of major obligations, I went into the card room. It was quite a full evening. It seemed as if every one of the set was there, even to old Lowndes, our paternal governor, who sat in his accustomed corner sipping "square-face" gin and water and beaming through his spectacles at the young bloods.

A word or two about the Rollers and old Alexander Lowndes. The Rollers had another and more respectable name. It was really only the cardroom

that was the Rollers' Club. This was a department set aside as a safety valve for surplus animal spirits. Stakes were high in there, heeltaps were in bad form, and a gentleman's note was as sound as Consols.

Old Alexander Lowndes was a prominent legal light, criminal pleading being his *forte*. He was a close friend of my father and did his legal business as an exception to his general special practice. Socially he moved in circles of heavy dignity, which the old gentleman hated like poison. He had his one recreation, however. Behind his spectacles two merry eyes looked out from a secret love of life and a wholesome human sympathy. He never touched the cards. I do not think he ever made a bet in his life. I believe that even his glasses of "square-face" and water were carefully numbered and limited. Yet he got his full share of all the excitement that was going at the Rollers, and I think, too, his quiet, paternal influence kept us reckless youngsters within decent bounds. His deploring "Come, come, lads!" nipped many a pretty quarrel in the bud.

On this particular evening the whist tables were abandoned and there was a distinct saving in billiard chalk. The Rollers were gathered around an innovation which was figuratively coining money. It was a roulette wheel which some misguided idiot had introduced to the club.

I watched the play for a while and felt my good resolutions gradually slipping into the bourne of time and space. I felt in my pockets for a half-sovereign and drew forth a sixpenny piece with a hole in it.

I was a little staggered for the moment. Then a thought occurred. With a chuckle I thrust my hand into the left-hand pocket of my coat, holding the bored sixpenny piece tightly in my closed palm. At the same time I placed a five-pound note on the red.

I won.

I left two fives on the red and won again. As I drew in my winnings I happened to catch old Lowndes's eyes fixed upon me curiously. He shook his head half humorously and wagged a forefinger in silent homily.

"It's all right, Uncle Sandy," I said. "I've got the governor's lucky sixpence."

"Weel," said the old gentleman in broad Scotch, "haud on to it, Jock."

"Exactly what I'm doing!" I chuckled, doubling again.

I won time and again. . . . But what use in repeating one of the five original stories? Before midnight the luck turned and my stock went away below par. When desperation to recoup gave up the ghost, all that was left of the five hundred pounds with which I had left home was barely sufficient to cover the remainder of my outstanding debts.

I turned away from the wheel, sick with disgust and savage toward myself. And, of course, the resolutions of the earlier evening crowded in like a flock of forlorn, bleating sheep.

"Sit down, Jock," said old Lowndes at my elbow.

I had just ordered the steward to bring me a whisky and soda. He served it at Lowndes's table.

I signed the wine-card and laid the bored sixpence on it. The old lawyer reached over, picked it up, and handed it back to me.

"It doesna seem to have brought ye much luck," said he. "Maybe it didna feel at hame in that sort o' coammerce. But for a' that I'd keep it, Jock, and if ye *will* throw awa' your money in riotous gratuities, gi'e the steward anither."

"I believe there *is* luck in it," said I, stowing away my father's sixpenny piece in a vest pocket. "So long as I held on to it like a rabbit's foot I won like the dickens; but I fell to thinking about a flabby-faced, flat-footed, liver-coloured person whom I met coming down town, and my money went like—well, the way it gets separated from any fool."

Old Lowndes poured a measured nip of "square-face" and added a splash of water carefully gauged by long practice of the wrist.

"You're twenty-one the day, Jock," said he.

"As the family lawyer, you ought to know."

"Oh, ay," said he, dryly. "I mind the day ye were born. It was a great storm in the land, and that night the Tay Bridge went down and took the passenger train with it. . . . Umm! . . . And so he gave ye his sixpence, did he?"

"And five hundred pounds, to say nothing of an ultimatum."

"Imphm? And it's about gone already—eh, Johnny lad?"

I admitted the sad fact.

Mr. Lowndes took off his spectacles, carefully wiped them, and put them on again.

"Come to my office in the morning, will ye?"

"Thinking of apprenticing me at four and tuppence a week?"

"I hae better use for my four and tuppences," said the old lawyer with a twinkle. "But I can offer ye a job, Jock—a job specially designed by an all-wise Providence for the like o' you.

"It's a gentleman's job," he added, with an assuring nod, "needing nae previous training, wi' a bit o' foreign travel in it and a spice o' adventure, maybe. Say ten o'clock. Will ye be there?"

"You whet my curiosity," I said. "Many thanks. I'll come."

That night I stayed at the Rollers Club. Then the Rollers knew me no more.

CHAPTER III

CAIN

HOW would you like to go to the island of Trinidad?" asked Mr. Lowndes, as soon as I was settled in a chair in his private office next morning.

I allowed that the prospect was pleasing.

"How would you like to wear spurs and a big hat and carry a long whip and ride a horse on a sugar plantation?"

"It sounds alluring."

"And get all your expenses paid—passage, outfit, bungalow, servants, food, and so forth, and thirty shillings a week to play with?"

"But of what use would thirty shillings a week be to me?" I asked.

"That, of course, is the thing ye've got to learn, Jock," said Lowndes, gravely. "Ye can save on it if ye want to. Living's no high in Trinidad. Out there a man can go straight to the deevil on a pound a week. Rum comes cheaper than soda water.

"Besides," he went on, "it would be your own money—money ye'd earned. It's wonderfu' how much further that kind o' sillar goes."

"What's the proposition?" I asked. "After

last night, I'm about ripe for anything. The farther away it takes me from Glasgow the better."

"Ye may have heard of Henry Burnaby," said Lowndes. "He owns a wheen o' sugar estates in Trinidad. It has aye been a rule o' his to recruit his overseers from Scotland. There's an opening just now. Tom Moore, of Moore & Leech, Burnaby's Glasgow agents, asked me if I knew of a promising young man who could start for the West Indies at once."

"I'm taking it upon my conscience to declare ye promising. Ye notice that, John?"

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Lowndes."

"Ye needna be. If ye're not up to the mark, Burnaby's plantation attorney will boot ye back by the next steamboat. But will ye try the job?"

My mind was made up on the spur of the moment. I would go if——

"Can it be arranged? Is the billet mine for the taking?"

"Weel, Jock, I'm not exactly offering ye the refusal of it. But if ye are seriously inclined—I daresay."

"When would I be expected to sail?"

"To-morrow afternoon on the *Antilles* from the Queen's Dock. She's Burnaby's charter and goes out at two o'clock."

"It's short notice."

"Ay, ay—for such a step in life as going to work, Jock," said Mr. Lowndes, solemnly. "But hark to me, lad. Your father will not know anything about last night, although—and I'm telling it to ye—I am very much in his confidence. It will appear to him

that this is your own doing and a step in the right direction.

"All ye have to do is pay a veesit with me to Tom Moore, who will advance ye twenty pounds for your outfit. He'll want your signature to some sort of contract. He'll also arrange your passage on the *Antilles*. The ship's a Burnaby employee like yourself. In the afternoon ye can skip down to the Jamaica Street shops and buy flannels and the needfu' things Tom'll tell ye about. Ye can spend this evening with your mother, and maybe, considering everything, your father will be glad to see ye, too. And the morn's afternoon ye'll be slipping down the Firth bound for Port of Spain. If I was as young as you, Jock, I'd hop at it!"

Something in me—hope or youth, or the spirit of adventure—*hopped* on the instant.

"I'm your man, Mr. Lowndes, and I'm a thousand times obliged to you."

Half an hour later I had signed my name to a wordy contract and was shaking hands with Mr. Tom Moore in the offices of Moore & Leech.

"Wear flannel and keep awa' frae rum, except to rub on the soles o' your feet after a wettin'," was the parting advice of Mr. Moore, who had been a planter's overseer in his younger days. "And for prickly heat, rub in lard and sprinkle wi' flour."

A few hours spent in the shops, and orders left for a trunk containing my purchases to be sent to the Queen's Dock before noon on the following day, completed all preparations for my departure from Scotland.

Then I went to my father's house. My mother shed tears, but was glad for the stand she supposed I had taken. When I appeared before my father in the evening and announced my plans, the glower with which he had greeted me changed to a satisfied smile.

"Sit down, John," said he.

We passed a pleasant evening, one of the few in which my father and mother and I were together at the same time and in perfect unity.

He was, as a rule, gone to the city when I appeared for breakfast, but next morning he and my mother were waiting for me when I came downstairs.

"I thought I might take a day off for once, John," said he, rather shyly, "and see ye off at the boat."

"Afraid I'll change my mind?" I laughed. "But, seriously, I'd rather you wouldn't. I'll say good-bye here—if you don't mind."

He looked at me and inclined his head.

"Very good. It may be as well. Then I can stay the day home wi' your mother."

I inwardly blessed the old gentleman for that.

After breakfast we had a long talk in the study. It was but the natural outcome of the situation. All differences were forgotten. Toward the end he said:

"Hadn't ye better have a—a little more money, John?"

"Thank you—no," I said, hardly knowing why I felt disinclined to take more of his coin. "You've been very good to me, sir."

He nodded approvingly and quietly shook hands with me.

I pass over the parting with my mother. An hour

later, with a portmanteau in my right hand and a certain moisture in my eyes, I went down the sandstone steps. A strange turnover in my cosmos had occurred in less than thirty-six hours.

It was but a short walk to the Queen's Dock on the Clyde, but the portmanteau was cumbersome. Not a vehicle of convenient sort was in sight. But at the corner I observed a squat fellow dressed like a stevedore.

"It's worth a bob," said I, "to carry this to the Queen's Dock."

To my surprise the fellow turned away without the civility of a word. Perhaps I had misjudged my man, for, as I said, my eyes were a little blurred as I left the house. But suddenly I knew the fellow, despite a knotted kerchief about his neck, a short clay pipe in his mouth, and a cap with the peak slewed over his left eye.

"He ought to disguise his feet and take in a tuck in his cheeks," I said to myself as I went on.

I was thinking of my own matters as I travelled toward the dock; but presently I reverted to the mysterious flabby person. What had he been doing so near the house, and why was he interested in me? He was certainly subject to suspicion. Possibly he was a thief and had designs upon my father's house. I had half a mind to go back and place him under the surveillance of the nearest policeman, or, as I finally decided, report him to the first constable I met.

I must have passed two or three officers of the law, but again I was looking ahead into my own prospects and had forgotten the very existence of the man

disguised as a stevedore. Reaching the Queen's Dock I found and boarded the *Antilles*. The purser was a genial soul. After showing me my cabin, he whistled up the supercargo and, in order to seal our better acquaintance, we three adjourned to a public house near the dock.

We exchanged compliments over a glass. Then the purser and the supercargo regretfully pleaded business aboard the steamer. I was returning with them when, right outside the public-house door, I collided with my flat-footed friend. There was no longer room for doubt. He had been following me.

"Hallo!" I cried, as if hailing an old friend. "You're just the man I'm looking for. Where's your bag?"

The man was like to drop with fright. He clutched at the hand I had laid firmly upon his arm, and whispered tensely:

"For good pity's sake, sir—don't give me away—not *before* people!"

I felt something interesting ahead of me. It would be an hour before the *Antilles* sailed. I waved a hand to the purser and the supercargo, who were standing on and off awaiting me.

"Right O, fellows!" I cried. "I've just met a friend. If you get a chance, come back for a farewell toast before we go out. Come in and have a nip," I added to my man of mystery.

He obeyed like a well-trained dog. There was a little table in a corner of the taproom, and at this we sat down while the barmaid served refreshment. Not until my novel guest had gulped down a glass

of particularly vile whisky did he seem able to command his tongue again.

"You know me, sir?" he said, in a tone of unutterable misery.

"Well, what if I do?"

"What if you do? Lord help me, sir—you won't give me away? 'Tisn't altogether my fault, sir, and I've got a little girl at home that's the very light of my eyes."

I was now sure that he was English. I had noticed a slight accent when I first met him.

"You see," he went on, rapidly, while his eyes remained fixed on mine with painful earnestness, "we've had to keep moving from one place to another, and it's pretty hard on the little girl. She's getting older every day and Lord knows how I'm ever going to explain it to her when the time comes.

"If I could only make you understand what I've gone through all on account of it, you'd not give me away or come troubling me. I know it's human nature, but maybe you've a generous heart, sir. I believe you have. I consider it a kindness, sir—I appreciate it, I assure you—to have—if only for once, sir—the privilege of—of taking a glass with a—a gentleman, sir."

The word came with a kind of reverence. His voice dropped to a whisper as he added with a sad smile:

"You wouldn't think, sir—you that knows the truth—that I—I—that I used to dress for dinner every blamed night of my life."

I had nothing to say. I was so astonished that I

could only stare at him. Was it all a pose, a beggar's trick, the whine of the practised Ananias? Yet that little plea of the dinner coat and that "light of his eyes" who was arriving at the inquiring age—— But what was it all about?

"I know it's hard for a man—a gentleman who has never felt the—the grinding of the mills of God—to understand. But tell me, sir, if I may make so bold to ask: Have you ever by any chance read 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol'?"

Then, to my further amazement, there came to my half-dazed mind a voice quietly intoning:

"With tears of blood he cleansed the hand,
The hand that held the steel:
For only blood can wipe out blood,
And only tears can heal:
And the crimson stain that was of Cain
Became Christ's snow-white seal.

"You understand, perhaps, sir," he went on in a half-shamed voice. "I was doing well, and there was the blessed baby. A plain man, sir, that asked nothing but the right to have his little share of life and happiness—a little love, a little play. Then she went away and—and I heard no more of her until she came back—and died. She only wanted to see the baby again and ask me not to think too hardly of her. I went mad, sir. I was a violent man then and I never rested until I found him. They gave me the death sentence, sir, but 'twas commuted to life, and——"

"Hold on! Hold on!" I cried. "You mustn't tell me this. You labour under a misapprehension!"

"I—I——," he stammered. "You——Then——?"

"I don't know anything about you. I merely wanted to find out why you were spying on me. I know, and want to know, nothing about your past. That is your affair entirely. Only—what concern have I with you?"

He looked steadily at me. A great light of relief came upon his countenance.

"Thank God!" he barely breathed. "I see now. I see."

"You haven't explained. Why did you spy on me?"

"I'll explain—quickly enough," he said, briskly. He was a changed man. "I'm not sorry now that I told you—as much as I did. That makes it easier. I appreciate the nice sense of honour that caused you to interrupt——"

"Never mind that. Explain."

"You will have inferred," he said, slowly, and seeming to measure every word, "that I have been—a convict. You know, sir, how the world regards a convict, how little chance he has to be honest when he is released from his cage, how he is hounded from one place to another when the truth leaks out, like Cain, sir, 'a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth', the cry of Abel's blood cursing him from the earth. Then there was the little girl, getting to the age——"

"I understand all that, and perhaps you have my sympathy. But come to the point."

"You seemed to follow me two nights ago. I know now you did not—intentionally. But you saw me do something which, I will grant you, appeared

suspicious. I believed you that night; yet for the little girl's sake I wanted to make sure that you did not know me, had not recognized me for what I am, that you had no motive in following me. I wanted to know who you were. I knew where you lived. You said it was your father's house.

"I came back and watched. I was satisfied and was going away when you spoke—about the portman-teau. I thought you did not recognize me. I caught the words 'Queen's Dock' and fancied you might be going abroad. If you were, I could rest easy. I wanted to make sure. That, sir, is why I followed you."

It was a perfectly plausible explanation. I believed the man was telling the truth—at least, as far as his explanation extended.

As I looked at him across the table I mentally placed myself in his position. Apparently he had killed his man, but under a provocation that, in some countries at least, was held to be some extenuation for a man becoming his own law, judge, and jury. For the rest, it was evident that his actions toward me were but efforts to maintain the peace of his home and the happiness of that little daughter of his.

"You poor devil!" I said, involuntarily.

The man started. His underlip twitched and for a moment it seemed that three words of sympathy had shattered his self-control.

"*But,*" I added, sharply, "I wouldn't go around private basements with a little brief bag full of assorted disguises. You lay yourself open to mis-construction."

"You are right, sir," he admitted. "But that part of it I cannot explain to you. I ask you to take my word, however, that I am an honest man. I swear it to you. I swear it by all I've got to swear upon—my little girl."

For answer I requested the lady of the bar to replenish the glasses. As she brought the refreshments, my odd friend touched my sleeve. He had a shabby little purse in his left hand.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, nervously, "but would you—would you mind if I asked you to—to let this be my treat?"

To judge by the look on his face, life or death to his soul depended upon the answer. I gave it.

"Thank you, sir," said he. He raised his glass. "I wish you peace to your mind and—and honour to your name."

Later, the purser and the supercargo returned for the farewell toast. They found me, I must confess, in rather a convivial mood with my friend, Cain. I introduced the latter by a name that he supplied as I paused in the ceremony—"Millard—David Millard, sir."

Then, as we still had half an hour to spare, we made a party of four, and the most brilliant member of the quartette was Mr. David Millard. He was apparently well-read and of apt memory. With every minute his nervousness passed. His tongue was the fluent key to a mine of anecdote, repartee, philosophy, and pertinent quotation, all seasoned with an Attic wit. When we parted company we allowed that he was one of the most entertaining, congenial fellows

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we had ever met. I could not reconcile him with the terror-ridden man who, but an hour before, had poured out that tragic tale of the hunted convict with his little, innocent daughter.

No doubt this was a red letter day when he could sit down with his fellows and wax convivial with a sense of equality and security.

And yet, as I write, an indescribable sensation steals over me as I reflect on the manner of man that was, to whose health and prosperity we drank many a hearty toast and who stood alone on the dock waving me a jovial farewell as I sailed for Port of Spain.

CHAPTER IV

IN VAGABONDIA

IT IS not merely for the sake of continuity that I sketch in the doings and wanderings of the ensuing five years. Vagabondia quite changed my character. It was also during my meanderings in its reckless realm that I made the fateful acquaintance of "Shylock" Smith, whom I knew as Joe Byrnes.

Trinidad appealed to me, as did the life of the sugar plantations—at first. Everything was novel, from the vegetation to the society. Here every white man was a "gentleman," no matter what he might have been at home. Class distinction was a matter of cuticle and pigment. This seemed highly necessary where humanity moved in all shades. The streets of Port of Spain were a kaleidoscope of black Africans, brown mulattoes, bronze-hued East Indian coolies, yellow Chinese, bleached Danes, swarthy Spaniards, blonde Germans, red-faced Englishmen, and sandy-haired Scots.

I will confess that, after the first novelty of life in the island had worn off, club life at Port of Spain claimed me more than the canefields did. Five days a week I dabbled in ratoons, weeding gangs, cane-cutting, mill-grinding, rum-distilling, etc. Then came week-ends at Port of Spain at the Planters' Club,

where gentleman agriculturists most did congregate; and a gay lot they were. I sometimes thought of Alexander Lowndes and his assurance that a man could go to the devil on a pound a week in Trinidad. Be that as it may, I saved nothing on thirty shillings!

It was almost with relief that I heard of the collapse of Henry Burnaby's fortunes. He had held on to sugar after most of the West Indies had abandoned it as a profitable industry in the face of beet. The crash came not unexpectedly. The smoke gradually ceased to ascend from the tall chimneys of the sugar works; tropic weeds presently crept through the floor plankings and coiled around rusting machinery; yesterday's beehive of activity became desolation, and I, with many others, found myself jobless in a strange land.

I had about fifteen pounds' capital. The fifteen went in one lively week at the Planters' and I discovered the cruel necessity of finding something to do. Now that I was unable to leave Trinidad if I wished to, the place became distasteful. The well-meant offer of a clerkship in an agricultural hardware store deepened my dislike for the island that Columbus discovered on Trinity Sunday.

Not being designed by nature for a saltless existence, I readily fell into the councils of a number of Venezuelan patriots who were plotting the restoration of an ex-President then exiled in Port of Spain. Soon after I became involved in a small matter of gun-running between Curaçao and an island called Cumana, and between Cumana and the Venezuelan mainland.

The revolution failed and your doubtful hero escaped the Dictator's clutches by "the last hair of a bald head," as the American consul playfully remarked. He was a good-hearted *hombre*, the American consul. It was he who helped me to a berth as assistant-supercargo of a tramp steamer. The tramp sailed in the nick of time.

I have since concluded that the South American tramp steamer is an institution for the rescue of the needy and distressed adventurer. At Paramaribo, our next anchorage, the skipper took a second unfortunate under his protecting wing.

This refugee came skulking aboard one evening after dark. I was the first person he encountered. Whatever he may have thought of me, I was not favourably impressed by him. He was emaciated, looked jaundiced, wore a suit of rags, and his hair was long and matted.

"I've been waiting this chance for two weeks," said he to me, "living the meanwhile on abandoned *tamales* and the like. I've clean forgot when I last had a meal that anybody else had any use for. Where's your skipper, gentle stranger? If there's any white blood back of his skin, I reckon I'll be a shipmate this cruise."

"He's taking a nap," said I.

"Then I sorter think it would be inconsiderate—lackin' in di-plomacy—to wake him up with a hard-luck story," said the ragamuffin. "I'll wait till he opens his eyes voluntarily, in the meantime prayin' that he's a Christian gentleman with a sunny disposition. You haven't got a bit o' baccy about you,

friend? My names Byrnes—Joseph Aloysius Byrnes. Escaped from Devil's Island five weeks ago."

"Eh!"

"I said a bit o' baccy," repeated Mr. Byrnes. "Haven't had a smoke in two weeks. Before that, not in two years. No self-denial scheme of mine, though," he added with a chuckle.

While awaiting the resurrection of the captain, Byrnes told me his story. His style of narrative conveyed the impression that he was a hardened sinner, yet not without a redeeming quality or two. He frankly admitted that he had done time on several occasions in his native England.

"I was no sooner out o' jug than I was in again," said he, quite cheerfully. "In fact, it got so bad that they had me in quod if I stood on a street corner and looked at a house. That's British justice for you!"

He left England for America, prospered in the States, then crossed to Europe with a select party aiming at "a pretty thing" in Paris. It had to do with the robbing of a French bank. Byrnes was the only one captured, and he was sent to the penal settlement on Devil's Island, off French Guienne.

Here Mr. Byrnes, it appeared, fell in with a desperate American named Jim Lefferts, who had also had an unfortunate collision with the French authorities and whose soul yearned, for some reason, to Broadway and Forty-second Street, New York. Byrnes and the desperate one effected a miraculous escape. They reached the Guiana jungles. Through an inferno of fever, thirst, starvation, and snakes, they

travelled for two weeks. Then Lefferts lay down and, as Byrnes related, "sent his regards to Broadway and croaked quite sudden."

"I buried him in the mud," said Joe Byrnes, "and put a cross made of branches at his head. I wish I'd had a camera along. His friends in New York might have liked to see how nice I fixed him up."

"But say, chum!" he broke off with great enthusiasm. "You ought to see that jungle! I used to be a dab with the camera. I was a photographer once, and when I was doing time I had a job of mugging them as they came in. If I'd had a little camera along this trip I'd be rich when I got back. Pictures? The first drink o' good water we had was from a water-fall that gave you 'tourist's neck' to look at it. It began away up in the sky and fell such a drop that we had to swallow a barrel o' froth before we felt we'd got our tongues wet."

"There's the skipper," said I, as the captain came down the bridge ladder.

I do not know what passed between the two; but presently the skipper uttered a hearty curse and said to the Devil's Island man:

"It's taking a downright advantage o' good nature! *That's* what it is! You knoo blame' well, once you got aboard, as a white man I couldn't turn ye back. Go on forrard, ye lobsouse, and slush yourself with a hosepipe and get some decent clothes on your back. But look 'e here! Nobody asked ye aboard this old packet and at the first sign of such rapscalliousness as got ye in that divil place I'll lay ye flat with a spike. Mind that!"

"Ay, ay, sir," said Mr. Byrnes, saluting solemnly. "I'm awful grateful, Colonel, and ye won't have no trouble with me."

Joe Byrnes was as good as his word. He was the best man forward and a more useful member of the ship's company than I, whose sole duties consisted in assisting the purser with his books, bills, and manifest. I was conscious that I was hardly worth my salt and that the skipper humoured my presence aboard only because I was a fair hand at chess, a game that was an obsession with him in the long days at sea.

For nearly five months I sailed with that tramp. We put in at Bahia, then sailed through Magellan to Valparaiso. It was at Bahia that Joe Byrnes came aboard one night with a small camera outfit and a full supply of chemicals for developing, etc. He had received no money from the skipper and it was a mystery how he had raised the wind ashore. In the light of later knowledge I have no doubt that he broke into a camera supply shop and helped himself.

Thereafter Joe's popularity increased. He made pictures of everybody and everything, from the skipper to the ship's pig, from the crosstrees to the stokehold. He considered his masterpiece a counterfeited presentment of me in a white drill suit, reading in a chair under an awning and wearing a neatly trimmed beard which I had allowed to grow. I bore a distinct resemblance to a popular fiction character beloved of tramp seafaring men, and from that day I was dubbed "Captain Kettle."

At Valparaiso the skipper got a charter for San

Francisco. I decided that upon our arrival there I would leave the ship and try a fresh start in the state of golden opportunities. During the run up the west coast, Byrnes, who had learned that I, like himself, was a kind of charity patient aboard, confided that he also was "tired of the racket."

At 'Frisco we announced our decision to the skipper, who was obviously sorry to lose Byrnes. Of me he said little, except that he would "miss the chess games." He finally gave us ten dollars each and chased us down the gangway, hoping, in a sudden gust of temper, that he would never clap eyes on us again, and swearing that never more would he lend a hand to jailbirds or *insurrectos*, even if they were blood relations!

San Francisco was another disaster for me—and Joe Byrnes. I was not competent to hold any position requiring special training and, while physically fit enough, I had a distaste for wielding a pick and shovel. Byrnes was the provider in those days. He kept a roof over our heads and supplied three excellent meals a day, until I grew suspicious and asked him where he got the wherewithal. He seemed surprised at my question, but my surprise outdid his when he offhandedly informed me that he had "cracked a little crib on Nob Hill!"

Thereafter I refused to live with him, or accept his bounty, unless he could assure me that it came from an honest source. It was a curious attitude for a dependent, and it was "turning honest" that was the undoing of Joseph. The incident somehow reminded me of Mr. David Millard of the Queen's

Dock at Glasgow and stirred, in a measure, a similar sympathy for Byrnes.

Joe came to our lodgings one night with a new pen, a bottle of ink, and a big pad of cheap paper. By the light of a candle stuck in a bottle he laboured far into the night, occasionally pausing in his writing to sort out a number of photographic prints which were littered on the table before him.

When I awoke in the morning Byrnes was lying beside me, sleeping the sleep of mental exhaustion. I got up and took a look at his manuscript. It was entitled, in a most atrocious fist:

HOW JEM LEFFERTS ESCAPED FROM DEVILS ISLAND

WRITTEN BY J. PRICE

With photographs by Joseph Aloysius Byrnes

So the authorship of the manuscript was ascribed to me—or, rather, to the name I had taken after leaving Trinidad. I smiled at the artistic vanity of that “Joseph Aloysius Byrnes.”

But amusement became tense interest as I deciphered the illiterate narrative. In it the gentle reader was informed that I, Jack Price, had heard from the lips of an emaciated man (name, Daniel Desprez—faked), who boarded an uncertain ship at Paramaraibo, this thrilling tale of the escape from Devil’s Island and later death in the Guiana jungle of the notorious American bank-robber, Jim Lefferts, known to the police of both hemispheres as “the most desprit criminal of the sentery.”

The photographs were faked, but I had to admire their ingenuity. For the emaciated man who boarded the ship at the Dutch colonial port, Byrnes had chosen a snapshot of "Skinny" Olafsen, one of the tramp steamer's crew. There was a photograph of "Where Daneil Desprez Burried Jem Lefferts in the Jungle"—showing a bit of tropical luxuriance shading a rude cross stuck in the ground. There were other manufactured scenes which yet tallied exactly with every detail of the story.

When Byrnes awoke he explained his plan for making an honest living. I was to polish up the spelling and grammar of the manuscript and sell the story to a Sunday newspaper. I had little scruple, as the 'Frisco papers seemed to prefer a bright yarn to a dull truth.

The financial result was encouraging. When the glaring tale came out on Sunday Byrnes swelled with pride of authorship. Half an hour later he was labouring over the rough draft of a second thriller. This time he had no illustrations, except a snapshot of himself which he was willing to have printed as a voucher of the tale's veracity. Again I was the author. This time I had met (in my extensive travels) a man who had confessed that he was the sole survivor of the Custer massacre and from an adjacent ridge had seen the annihilation of the regiment!

"But there were no survivors!" I protested.

"That's what makes the story!" said Byrnes, quietly. "There was, and this yarn's straight, pal."

He then told me what I later found in the narrative,

that he had met such a man and heard such a tale from his lips. The survivor was living under an assumed name and could not come to life, because he was either a deserter or "dead" on the Little Big Horn. He had been sent with a team of army mules, either for or with supplies (I forget the exact details now), and had acquired a bottle of whisky. He had become intoxicated, driven the wagon and mules over a precipice, and himself fallen into a drunken stupor. He was awakened later by a terrific uproar and, looking over the ridge, saw Custer and his men cut down to the last man by the Sioux.

Afterward Byrnes's friend changed his clothes and his name and dropped out of "existence."

The Sunday editor almost wept over that story. He printed Joe's picture and——

Next day Byrnes burst in on me. His face was the colour of suet and he was very profane. It appeared that a summary of the Devil's Island story had found its way East. The police of New York had recognized an old friend in Jim Lefferts. They had also "spotted" Joseph Aloysius Byrnes as *alias* "Shylock" Smith, a desirable party. The San Francisco police had been notified to leave a card on Joe and, to make matters worse, there was Byrnes's picture in the previous day's Sunday newspaper!

Aside from the fact that I did not want to be arrested as a suspicious person in the company of a man wanted by the police, I felt that my duty on this occasion was to stand by Byrnes. In ten minutes we had abandoned our lodgings. In half an hour we had allowed ourselves to be roped in by a sailor's board-

inghouse runner, who shipped us as green hands aboard the whaler, *Seabreeze*, and no doubt cashed our advance notes when we were well out to sea.

That whaler was a floating inferno. The captain spent the first three weeks in his berth, then appeared on deck with delirium tremens. The first officer ran the ship. He was the most diabolical ruffian I ever dreamed could exist and have been born of gentle woman.

It is not my intentions to make a story of my travels and adventures. You will perceive that I have material enough for such a book, but nothing that happened to me *then* was better or worse than is daily recorded in fact and fiction. So I hasten toward the closing incidents of my life in vagabondia and come to those which have no parallel, so far as I know.

We made several anchorages in South Sea harbours, and there were many vain attempts at desertion by the men. The last stop before setting sail upon a steady two-year cruise of whale waters was made for water at Coffin Island in the Bonin group.

I had been looking forward with horror to that monotonous cruise. In the relief at getting out of 'Frisco neither Byrnes nor I had thought much about what might be ahead. But two months on the *Seabreeze* had given us a foretaste of what two years would be.

"It's now or never," said Byrnes to me. "I'm going ashore, or be shot trying."

Luck was with us. The captain was again drunk in his cabin. The first mate had gone ashore to the

native village for the night—the last night for two years. The second officer, a Mr. Lozier, was in charge, but he must have been writing a letter to his sweetheart, for we were able to drop overboard unobserved and swim one mile to the beach, Byrnes with his beloved camera wrapped in burlap and oil-cloth and slung around his neck.

Exhausted and dripping, we crawled into the brush by the native village and resolved to remain there until we could ascertain whether the ship would sail without us or we be pursued.

We fell asleep. When we awoke it was to find the first officer (Jermyn was the brute's name) standing over us with a fiendish grin.

"Were you swine thinking of coming aboard?" he asked with exaggerated politeness.

I had stood a good deal from this man and did not propose to share his company any longer. I made a pass at him with my fist. With a snarl he lunged at me. Next moment we were dancing around one another in a serious game of fisticuffs.

I had some science. He had much brawn. He bruised me considerably before I got in a neat tap that sent him sprawling his full length. He scrambled to his feet, but I met him with another tap that landed on top of the first one and left him senseless. As my fist met the point of his jaw I heard a metallic click. Turning, I discovered Joe Byrnes in the act of collapsing his camera.

"It's a beauty!" said he. "A beauty! I'd 'a' got the first crack only the sun was wrong. Let's *vamos*—quick!"

We left Jermyn flat on his back and took to the brush. We went without food that day. Toward night we reconnoitred from a hilltop in the centre of the island and discovered the *Seabreeze* still at anchor. For the next two days we played hide-and-seek with a search party led by the vengeful first mate. I write down the fact lightly enough, but Heaven knows what we suffered. We found water, but had no food, and the brush was a sweltering place. We finally stole a native canoe and made an adjacent island of the little group. Next day the *Seabreeze* sailed without us.

I may add that that ship never returned to any port on earth. In after days, when the great trouble fell upon me, I sometimes thought it would have been lucky for me had I remained aboard and gone to the bottom with her. In any event, John Price is officially dead. He sailed out of 'Frisco in the fated *Seabreeze*.

Some time later Joe Byrnes and I were picked up by a Japanese cruiser in the Bonin Islands. They say Byrnes was unconscious and had a left leg that was badly swollen from a poisonous thorn in the foot, while I was quite delirious from starvation and fever. We were taken to Japan. For some time we served in the Japanese navy before a Yankee skipper stowed us in his forehold. Then we made a second voyage around the Horn and arrived at New York.

Here Byrnes renewed acquaintance with certain friends at Broadway and Forty-second Street. He appeared before me the day after our arrival wearing a flashy suit, a checked waistcoat, and a huge yellow

diamond. He chucklingly informed me that he had fallen upon a bed of feathers and that the police of New York were so unsophisticated that they travelled in pairs so they would not get lost. He was deaf to all my pleadings for honesty. Finally, after all our adventures together, we parted company. It was a partnership that could have lasted only under the circumstances in which it was formed.

Later, I shipped on a homeward-bound Norwegian barque and was paid off at Hamburg, whence I travelled to Scotland. Thus, on the seventh day of June in the most memorable year of my life, I set foot again in Glasgow, sadder but wiser for my five years' experience in vagabondia.

But I had met Byrnes, and Destiny had grimly decreed that I was to meet him again.

CHAPTER V

I PLAY SIR GALAHAD

IT WAS with the feeling of the prodigal that I turned toward my father's house, knowing full well that, deserving nothing, I would be rewarded with more than my desert. I was now quite ready to settle down and attend to the jute business, and particularly to the sage counsel of my senior.

My heart was beating thickly as I traversed the few squares between the omnibus and the house. It would probably be necessary to announce my identity, for I had changed beyond recognition. The immaculate youth of twenty-one, with his smooth face and his gloves and cane, had become a sinewy, well-developed man with a seafaring swing and a "Captain Kettle" figurehead. In my pocket I had more than twenty golden sovereigns, what remained of the sums received when I was paid off at New York and Hamburg; but I had decided to buy no more fashionable raiment until my father and mother had seen me as I appeared after five years' buffeting about the world.

After all, it was a keen disappointment to find the town house closed and boarded up. Had I not been so full of the idea of directly meeting my people, I must have remembered that at the beginning of

every June they moved to our country place in the Isle of Bute. But it was still the custom of my father to come into the city each day; so I went to the nearest public telephone and called up the offices of the jute business in Mitchell Street.

Again I was disappointed. Stebbins, the manager, said that my father had been ailing and had decided to remain out of town for several weeks. I did not give Stebbins my name, although he asked for it and learned that I was "a friend of the family." Presently I walked slowly back to the city deciding that I would go to the Isle of Bute in the morning.

In the meantime, there was the evening to be passed. I thought of the Rollers, but dismissed, almost with impatience, the idea of a visit. I should be conspicuous there in my plain blue serge and double buttons. Then, too, I was no longer interested in the phase of life which had so absorbed my unregenerate days. Instead of looking up the Rollers, I went to the old Gaiety, sat with the "gods," and found myself lustily joining with them and a stout, plaid-wrapped Variety lady in the chorus of "Her Lad in the Scotch Brigade."

After the variety theatre I went in search of a cheap hotel. Why cheap, I hardly stopped to consider, except that to-morrow, no doubt, I would again be a man of class and means. It was the same sentimental desire to linger at the last outpost of vagabondia that attracted me to a hoarding where a poster announced a special excursion on the following day (and at a ridiculously low fare) of the steamer, *Peveril of the Peak*, to Rothesay and the Kyles of Bute.

The thing appealed to me. I had never experienced but had heard much in song and jest of the humours of a plebeian trip "doon the water." I, myself, was bound for Rothesay, the capital of the Isle of Bute. At once I decided to make my last farewell to vagabondia in a trip by the *Peveril*.

That decision completely altered the course of my life.

The steamer glorying in the name of *Peveril of the Peak* was a garishly painted fire-trap with two red funnels and copiously gilded paddle boxes. Every possible square foot was given over to saloons and promenade decks. A string band discoursed music-hall hotch-potch and the second fiddle passed the hat every half hour.

I got aboard five minutes before sailing time. There seemed hardly room for another human being on, or in, that steamer; yet the company officials packed in hundreds after me. When finally the ropes were cast off and the *Peveril* staggered down the stream, it was to be observed that the port paddle box was submerged while the paddles on the starboard side wildly revolved in thin air. At Dumbarton there was a rush to starboard for a better view of the historic rock, and now it was the port paddles that beat the air like the wings of an unattached windmill.

At Greenock, where the river widens into the Firth of Clyde, the salt air blew up from the Atlantic and mingled with a whiff of peat and heather from the Cowal Hills. The licensed bar of the *Peveril* was doing a prosperous business and many a Glasgow Jock and Sandy already felt the full spirit of the

occasion. The band struck up a famous "doon-the-water" song and a red-haired "keelie" bawled the verses of "The Day We Went to Rothesay-O!"

We startit frae the Broomielaw
'Mid rain an' hail an' sleet an' snaw,
An' at twenty meenutes aifter twa,
We got the length o' Rothesay-O!

And after each verse five hundred voices howled the inane chorus:

Durra my dee, my daddy, O!

It was third-class low comedy—the annual effervescent outing of Glasgow's great unwashed. I might have enjoyed it more but for a diverting interest in a young woman for whom I presently procured a camp-stool, every fixed seat on the steamer being packed with squawking humanity.

"Thank you," she said, smiling and looking up into my face with frank gray eyes. "Isn't this fun?"

That she should thus open a way to informal acquaintance disappointed me. I had been thinking of her as a type somewhat astray in this flotsam. I made some light comment and walked away. At any other time, perhaps. . . . At present I was going to my mother.

Yet I could not keep my eyes off that young woman. She was perhaps a little more than twenty; winsome, brown-haired, and with the most beautiful eyes I ever saw, except in a child. There was a touch of sadness about her face in repose, a little droop of the tender mouth, and an eternal question in her gray

eyes. But most of the time her countenance was greatly animated and her eyes flashed delighted appreciation of the human comedy.

She puzzled me. There was a natural refinement about her. A woman with such a face could not be vulgar; yet the blatant commonness of the *Peveril's* company seemed the essence of life to her. It was possible, of course, that she knew so little of the world that all things seemed right to her pure vision. She somehow impressed me thus, while her presence, apparently unescorted, in that mob, contradicted the impression.

I saw her again a little later. She was leaning over the burnished rail surrounding the showy "open-work" engines. The engineer, a handsome fellow with blond moustache and resplendent in gold lace and buttons, was watching her face with speculative interest. The plunge of the piston, the twirl of the governor, and the smug, self-congratulating action of the eccentrics seemed to fascinate the girl as some mechanical novelty might a child.

The handsome engineer twirled his moustache and finally addressed her. She at once entered into an animated conversation, which was kept up until the bridge signalled for a stop at Dunoon pier. As the great piston ceased heaving and plunging at the engineer's touch upon the levers, the young woman regarded him with something like hero-worship.

I decided that she was either a very dangerous coquette or a lovely little girl whose parents had too much faith in the world's chivalry.

A third time I encountered her and on this oc-

casion, coquette or maid in distress, she certainly made me her servant and champion knight for the rest of that day—and after.

Even as I, she had apparently waited until the crowd in the dining saloon had abated before attempting to obtain luncheon. There were comparatively few persons seated when I entered. One of the few was the winsome lass with the trusting eyes. I took a place facing her but some tables distant.

The steward, a pasty-faced youth with a loose mouth, was serving her. He seemed oblivious of the needs of other patrons. I finally got his eye with a certain expression in my own and succeeded in conveying my order. Without turning it in, he lingered to exchange a few more pleasantries with the young woman who, I now observed, was suffering slight embarrassment. Presently the steward came back to me. Without apology he said:

“What was it you wanted again?”

What I said in reply sent him off in a hurry. Bringing the food, he slapped it on the table and again went smirking toward the winsome lass.

Hot with anger I kept an eye on the man as I ate. The young woman's embarrassment increased. The steward was leaning jauntily on the back of her chair, with one foot tiptoed over the other, and he was apparently progressing in his self-esteem. Presently the young woman arose, her face flushed and her eyes full of hurt wonder.

I was on my feet almost as quickly. Nothing could have suited me better. I walked forward,

pushed the steward aside, and said to the young woman:

"What was that he said to you?"

She recognized me as the provider of the camp-stool and smiled her relief and my welcome. The steward looked uneasy.

"What did he say?"

"He—— He asked me," she stammered, "if my—my mother knew I was out?"

"And does she?" I asked upon an impulse.

"My—my mother's—dead," said the young woman, helplessly.

A wave of white-hot indignation took possession of me. The pasty-faced waiter turned a half somersault and landed on his back. He was not hurt, for I had applied only a simple aggressive movement of a science acquired during a brief sojourn with the Japs. But there was considerable confusion in that saloon. The chief steward appeared and waxed cantankerous; but my explanation, backed by the corroboration and approval of the other patrons, tamed him. He sent the offending waiter aft and tendered an apology on behalf of the company.

It was all over in a minute. I returned to my table and resumed my luncheon. The young woman finished hers and went on deck, her eyes carefully averted from mine. Later, I found her out near the taffrail and planted a camp-stool beside her.

"May I smoke?" I asked as I sat down.

She looked at me in a frightened way. Her faith seemed to have suffered a shock. She bit her pretty lip and nodded her head.

"And now," I said, "does your *father* know you're out?"

"Yes," she said, a little stiffly.

"Is he with you?"

"No. He is not." There was a little defiance this time.

"I wished to thank you for your—your assistance," she presently said, and bowing, she turned her head in a kind of final way.

"I presumed that you would wish to," I said, "and took this way of helping you get it over."

"Thank you," she said.

I got up, but she looked up at me with a sudden pleading in her eyes.

"Don't go. I—I don't mind your sitting here. You see—I'm alone and——" Actual tears came into her eyes. "I'm sorry I—I came. I didn't know people were—like that."

She was, I decided, just what she seemed: a lovely, innocent little woman. But what sort of guardian must her father be?

"I don't quite understand," I said. "It isn't usual for a little lady like you to be alone on a trip of—this sort. I daresay it's your first experience—and last?"

"I've never been anywhere before," she replied, frankly. "My father and I live together and he—he doesn't go out much. I've always wanted to—to go out a little. I plagued him this time until he let me go."

"If you looked at him like that, I either hardly blame him for yielding or blame him all the more."

"I don't—understand you," she said, wide-eyed.

"Perhaps I don't intend that you should. But out of your abounding faith in human nature, do you suppose you could trust me—at least until we get to Rothesay? My name is Sheffield—Jack Sheffield."

"And mine is——" She stopped short with knitted brows. Again the phantom of doubt whispered something in my ear.

"So difficult to remember?" I said, lightly.

Up went her shapely chin with a little defiance and pride.

"No. I was just thinking. Perhaps I might not give you my real name. You didn't give me yours."

I was a little startled. Her gray eyes were fixed on mine with a look of intuition.

"Perhaps I didn't. But my first name is Jack. Of that you may be sure."

"Perhaps it is better that way. My first name is Jess. Of that *you* may be sure. Bunthorne is my—the other name."

"Very well, Miss Bunthorne."

"But I would rather you called me Jess."

"So?" said I. "You are—rather unusual, Miss Jess."

"Am I?" There was nothing but surprise in the question.

"Very. But it may square things a little if, for the present, at least, you call me Jack."

"Would that be—nice?"

Again I glanced at her. Just what did she mean by "nice"? I gave her the benefit of the doubt.

"Much more correct, under the circumstances."

There seemed no question now about her accepting my escort. She obeyed me like a child. All the while, as I delved deeper into her genuine unworldliness, I became more incensed against her father. My doubts of her, personally, evaporated like morning mist. Before we reached Rothesay I had half a mind to go down and thrash the engineer, too, for nothing in particular.

My purpose in visiting Rothesay, of course, was to see my father and mother. They lived within an hour's drive of the island capital. But I failed to see how I was to appear before them with a young woman whose presence in my company I could hardly explain, not even to my own satisfaction. Yet I had no thought of leaving Jess alone in the streets of Rothesay, although just what I proposed to do with her in the end I had as yet no idea. Sufficient for the hour was her presence therein.

This was a very happy day—"the day we went to Rothesay-O!" The sights and sounds of the coast resort, which is to Glasgow what Margate is to London and Coney Island to New York, were to Jess like a first circus to a small boy. Yet it must not be thought that she was a child in her conception of things. She frankly admitted that she had never seen anything like it before, which again set me to wondering what her life had been; but she had read considerably—much more, I suspected, than ever I had—and commented on everything with a fresh, ripe intelligence that rejuvenated much that was stale for me.

Her trust in me was something as inexplicable as it

was sublime. It made me conscious of my shortcomings and set me on strict guard over them. I felt as I used to in the days when my mother showered trusting affection on my unworthiness. I had a sudden desire to summon a carriage and drive with Jess to where that mother awaited me. I had no fear of my mother's probable reception of Jess, but——

"This is Jess," I pictured myself saying to my father. "Her other name may be Bunthorne, but I don't think it is. I can't tell you who she is, or where she comes from. I believe her father is a man who lets her go alone on a 'doon-the-water' trip, where she made the acquaintance of the engineer and me and got insulted by a pasty-faced steward with whom I wiped up the dining-room floor. I've been knocking around with her and paying her expenses all day. We're going back to Glasgow together in the evening, probably, but in the meantime, as I've been away so long, I thought I'd bring her up to meet you and mother and have dinner with us."

I took her to the old castle and the aquarium. We spent an hour in a rowboat in famous Rothesay Bay. I bought her lollipops and souvenirs of the resort, and we mingled with the heterogeneous crowd on the esplanade, her little left hand always clinging confidently to my right arm. By four o'clock in the afternoon I saw that I was going back to Glasgow that night.

I would not hear of her travelling by the *Peveril* again. I took possession of her return ticket, much to her distress, tore it into little bits, and bought two

singles by an earlier steamer that connected with a train for Glasgow at Wemyss Bay.

This steamer was not crowded and the firth was beautiful in the prolonged June dusk. She sat close to me in a cool angle of the upper deck and it was as if we had known each other always.

"It has been a wonderful day for me," she said.

"And for me—quite remarkable."

"But you have travelled so much. Do you know that I was never on a ship before and never saw the sea and—never met any one so kind as you have been to me?"

I was afraid for such innocence, not for herself and me, but for her future in that selfsame world. I was filled with a desire—paternal, or elder-brotherly, I supposed—to gather her in my arms and snarl on her behalf at all mankind. She had laid four little fingertips on my left sleeve. I laid my right hand upon them and—it rested there.

She was tired when we came to Wemyss Bay. We went to the waiting train arm in arm. A conductor smiled, threw open a compartment door, and said:

"In here, sir!"

I blessed the man while I could have punched his face for the grin on it.

It was a warm evening, even for June. The compartment was stuffy. While I lowered the windows, Jess removed her bonnet. Then we sat together in a corner. No one else entered. Presently Jess's head drooped and gently subsided upon my shoulder.

She did not awake when the train started, or in-

deed until we reached Glasgow. Then I raised her chin with my hand and said:

"Time to go home, Jess."

She was dazed to find herself in the city. When I told her she had been asleep, she naïvely said:

"And to think that I missed any of it!"

I insisted upon accompanying her home. It was she who hailed a particular omnibus. It was of the same route which I had taken on the previous day when going to our town house. Furthermore, we got off at nearly the same point and her way led me past the boarded-up mansion. We turned the corner and continued for several squares. Finally she led me into a narrow, old-fashioned thoroughfare at the far end of which an iron railing formed a *cul-de-sac*. The railing enclosed a bit of lawn and garden, much neglected, and fronting a house in which not a single light appeared, although it was now fairly dark.

"Good-night, Jack," said Jess.

"It's hardly eight o'clock," said I, retaining her hand. "Couldn't I meet your father? It is due you, Jess. You have spent the day with me and—I'd like him to know me, at least."

"Oh, no," she said, a little hurriedly. "It isn't necessary. And—and my father doesn't—doesn't meet many people."

I looked again at the cottage. It seemed quite untenanted. There was not even a glimmer of light in the transom.

"Then I will call. May I?"

"I don't know," she said, with some confusion.

"Then I surely will," I said, "to-morrow. Tell him I am coming. I think he will understand."

I bent and kissed the little hand in mine. She seemed startled.

"Oh, Jack!" she whispered, then turned, ran past the gate, and up to the house.

I heard her knock upon the door. There was silence. Then she knocked again. Presently the door was opened about five inches, and I heard the chink of a tightened chain.

"Is that you, Jess?" a low voice asked.

"It is Jess."

The chain was detached and the door further opened, but just enough to admit the girl. Then it was shut and the house was seemingly as tenantless as ever.

Quite mystified, I walked slowly out of the blind alley to where it met the street. There was a lamp at the corner. I looked at the sign on it in order to get my bearings. The name, with a painted hand pointing up the alley, was: CHAMBER'S CLOSE.

CHAPTER VI

THE FACE IN THE MIRROR

I RETURNED to the Crown Tavern, on St. George's Road, where I had lodged on the previous night.

Upon entering the rather dingy hotel, I caught sight of a man who had just entered his name in the register and was even then on his way upstairs.

There was something familiar about this person's back. As he turned the angle of the staircase I got a momentary glimpse of his profile. That also conveyed an impression of familiarity. There was a fancied resemblance to someone I had perhaps known slightly at one time or other and had temporarily forgotten. He had a short moustache and small, close-cropped "mutton-chop" whiskers.

After all, I could not place the man. I dismissed him from my mind as he disappeared up the stairs and only glanced at the preceding entry on the register as I wrote for myself, "John Sheffield . . . Glasgow." My predecessor appeared as "H. Jonson . . . Liverpool."

The room to which I was assigned was the same I had slept in on the previous night. The circumstance set me to thinking of what had befallen in the meantime. Fate had interposed between my in-

tention to return to my former life and that intention's execution. Indeed, I felt a conviction that Fate was weaving some sort of mesh around me and that any step whatsoever that I might take would only enmesh me further.

The sight of that name on the street lamp, identifying the blind alley as Chamber's Close, had stirred reminiscence—of a mysterious man with a little bag who divested himself of a false beard under my father's stoop and with whom I later had an encounter under that very street lamp.

I thought of the morning thirty-six hours after the encounter, when again I had met the man disguised this time as a stevedore. I remembered how he shadowed me to the Queen's Dock and told me a pathetic tale at the waterside public house.

It had all happened five years before, but I had not forgotten any detail. I seemed to see the face of the ex-convict, David Millard, and hear him speak of that little daughter, "the light of his eyes," to whom he must sooner or later reveal the sordid secret of his life.

Involuntarily I was picturing Jess as that daughter—dear, innocent, lovable Jess. I was startled when I realized how I had linked her with this memory of David Millard. But the sign of the street lamp and all the mystery of Jess's present and past life, which my theory would explain, had forged the link in fancy, and in fancy it kept recurring.

Finally I laughed at myself. The circumstance of a coincident sign on a lamp was a flimsy thing upon which to hang the idea that Jess was the daughter of an ex-convict murderer.

"Anyway," I thought, as I turned off the gas and went to bed, "I shall meet him to-morrow evening."

From which I inferred, as I lay awake, that the Other Person of the dual personality which was at odds within me had decided to ignore the plans of the First Person. I was not going to see my parents next day. I was going to remain in Glasgow and meet Jess and her father in the evening instead. The Other Person was quite decided upon this. The First Person was equally decided upon going to Rothesay. I and Me finally compromised. I decided to postpone my visit to my parents until I had visited a tailor and been made more presentable, quite forgetting the contrary decision of the previous day to present myself at home as I had come off the sea and be so judged.

The Other Person cackled in the ear of my conscience and whispered that I only wanted to see Jess again. To prove the Other Person entirely wrong in this I actually visited a tailor next morning. My sneering *alter ego* cackled further when the tailor assured me that my orders could not be properly filled within a week.

"Well!" I retorted, replying to the inward small voice, "that does not mean a week before I visit my parents. I can go to-morrow if I see fit."

It was evening—after seven, to be exact—before I went to Chamber's Close. I might have yielded to the impulse to go in the afternoon, but if Jess's father was in business I could hardly expect to find him at home during the day. On the other hand, if, as Jess had intimated, he did not meet many people,

the man who challenged his own daughter over the door-chain would hardly welcome a stranger in broad daylight. Besides, after supper is the correct hour for social calls in middle-class circles.

The house at the end of the blind alley did not seem as deserted as on the previous evening. There was a single dim light burning in the lobby and throwing an oblong of reddish yellow against the transom. But all the rest of the house was dark. Probably Jess was her father's housekeeper and the family of two lived mostly at the rear of the house.

I passed through the bit of garden to the front door and knocked. At first there was no response. After a second and louder knocking I heard a foot-step or two and a sound of whispering.

Presently the door was opened a few inches. Although I could see but a portion of a face, I knew that it was Jess who was looking at me over the guard-chain.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"This is—Jack Sheffield," I said. "I came to pay my respects and make acquaintance with your father, Miss Bunthorne."

Jess hesitated. As she did so, a voice came in a stage whisper from the farther end of the lobby:

"Is it—he—again?"

"It's—it's—Mister——" she stammered, still keeping the door on the chain. "It's the—the gentleman I told you about. May I ask him in?"

There was silence from beyond.

"Excuse me—just a minute," said Jess, through the five-inch space.

Softly she closed the door. While, I suppose, she went to confer with her father, I was left to kick my heels on the doorstep. I hardly knew whether to laugh or be indignant. I felt like doing one and being the other at the same time. It did not occur to me, however, to show my resentment by marching off.

A half-minute, perhaps, passed; then the guard-chain was released. The door swung wide open and Jess bade me enter. A swift glance along the dimly lit lobby revealed no one but herself. Somehow her two hands met mine and there was no mistaking her pleasure at the meeting.

"You mustn't mind him," she whispered, hurriedly. "He's always like that, and he's perhaps a little more than usual to-night. You see, he wasn't pleased—about yesterday."

"I should hardly expect him to be pleased," I said. "But he could not blame any one but himself."

She lowered her eyes and suddenly took her hands from mine.

"But you must come in and sit down."

She led me from the lobby into a dark room, beyond which there was a faint light gleaming through heavy curtains. We went through these and came into a small but pleasant living room with a fire burning in an open grate.

It was a comfortable room, one that had been much lived in. It was furnished in good taste and the walls were decorated with excellent pictures and well-filled bookcases. On an old mahogany table stood a reading lamp, under which lay an open book, face downward. It was the "Canterbury Tales." There

was also a current magazine with a name pencilled on the top of the cover—"Daniel Bunthorne."

Jess led me to a chair by the fire. She sat opposite me. Beyond her, my own face and the back of her brown head were reflected in a mirror over a chiffonier. There was no sign of Jess's father. I could only wait his pleasure to appear.

"Well—how has the day been for you, Jess?" I asked, quietly. "Have you succeeded in realizing that yesterday actually happened?"

"I don't know—not quite," she said, her face colouring a little. "It's been a tangled-up sort of a day."

I laughed.

"Mine has been like a dream—the dream of a sleep-walker. I have been walking, yet not sure of being wholly awake."

She smiled.

"I, too. But there have been other things."

I observed her more closely. Something had departed from her face. It was not her beauty; indeed greater, maturer, beauty had mysteriously come there. Her eyes were slightly darker, as if she had wept at intervals; and the childish innocence had gone from her expression. Her mouth was firmer, too. Character—grown, womanly character—had suddenly developed in her young face.

"You have been talking with your father?" I ventured.

"Yes."

"And he was displeased?"

"Yes—and no. He was annoyed—very upset

about—about the things that happened. He was very pleased, however, about you—about all you did——”

“Except?” Exception lurked in her manner.

“I told you that he—he is peculiar about—that he seldom meets people. He was angry when I said you were coming. He said I had no right to ask you.”

“You didn’t. You tried to prevent my coming.”

“But you were right to come. I see that now,” she said. “I told him so. I——”

She stopped short and coloured deeply.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I do not know why I said that to you. I ought not to.”

“You need not, anyway. I think I understand.”

Which I thought I did. There had been a little clash. The trip to Rothesay had opened her eyes. She had told her father everything. He had perhaps blamed her for the results of his own neglect, his own upbringing of her. She had resented that, and perhaps had asked for an explanation of some things—why, for instance, he had allowed her to grow up in ignorance of the world that she must encounter sooner or later; why there existed any reason against receiving the visit of an honourable man, who merely wished to make her father’s acquaintance and, in the making, offset any misconstruction of the previous day’s gallantries.

“But, of course, there is another reason for his being—a little upset to-night,” Jess added. “We never have visitors. To-day we have had two. Just think of it—two! But it was the other man who was

the more unwelcome. He came in the afternoon and was not—prepossessing.

“What are your favourite books?” she broke off with startling abruptness. “I have periods of author-worship. I devoured all of Thackeray and became a cynic. Then I had a siege of Dickens and all the world was very sad and very laughable, too. Then it was Shakespeare, and I found what fools we mortals be.”

She was talking at great speed and her eyes and hands were darting here and there. But I knew the cause of her sudden chatter. I had seen it and was even then watching it in the mirror behind her.

At the extreme rear of the reflected picture I saw that a door had opened a little way. A face—the face of a man—was looking into the room. A pair of wide, searching eyes were scrutinizing my back as if their owner sought to establish my identity before venturing further acquaintance.

Jess’s chatter suddenly ceased. Her face was pale with annoyance and nervous embarrassment. She chirruped suddenly and bit her underlip. At that the face in the mirror disappeared and the door silently closed behind me.

Jess’s patience completely gave way. Obviously she was no more the child of yesterday. Something had occurred to awaken her mind. She was now a woman, determined to establish her right to courtesy, at least.

The door was no sooner closed than she arose. There was something very definite about the way she excused herself and crossed the room to that door

behind me. I pretended to have noticed nothing. I did not follow her with my eyes, except in the mirror.

I saw her reflected image throw open the door and heard her say with a little incisive note:

"Father, I want you to come in. Mr. Sheffield is here and will be going presently. He would like to make your acquaintance."

There was silence. Then a figure appeared in the doorway. I saw the man's reflection make a gesture that was half protest, half unwilling resignation. I lowered my eyes from the mirror and did not look up again until someone stood at my elbow. Then I arose as Jess said:

"Father, this is Mr. Sheffield, who was so kind to me yesterday. Mr. Sheffield, this is my father."

"How do you do, Mr.—Bunthorne," I said.

I found myself looking straight into the eyes of Jess's father and at the same time shaking hands with one who was also my quondam acquaintance of the midnight streets, the Queen's Dock, and the waterside public house.

Mr. Bunthorne was, as I had suspected, one and the same with Mr. David Millard.

CHAPTER VII

THE MESH DRAWS TIGHTER

AT A glance it was apparent that Bunthorne, or Millard, or whatever his name, did not recognize me. I decided not to make myself known; at least, until the position developed more clearly. To acknowledge previous acquaintance would be to embarrass the situation and the man who, under a misconception, had revealed to me a part of his life's secret.

Although I had anticipated the discovery that Bunthorne and Millard were one and the same, yet it came as something of a shock. For the first time I fully realized that it meant much to me, that it greatly bore upon any possible future relationship with Jess.

It was easy enough to tell myself that, after all, I had known Jess less than thirty-six hours and that if we now went our separate ways it would little affect either of us; but it was not so easy to believe it. For the suddenly developed certainty of her father's identity drew me closer in sympathy with her—and with the man, too.

She was the daughter of a convict, but I knew something of that convict's misfortune. The father against whom I had inwardly raged on the previous

day now stood in a new light. Even as I had felt sorry for Millard at the waterside public house, I more than ever sympathized with him now that I had come to know Jess—that same “light of his eyes.”

Briefly, the fact that he was a convicted man-killer and she his daughter disturbed me more for their sake than my own. I suddenly more than half believed that I was in love with Jess. The prospect opened up in that moment of introduction was no more disconcerting than the realization that I had taken Jess into my calculations of the future. But in the light of the new development I saw the material impossibility of presenting her to my parents. I could hear the tone of my father's comment on the situation:

“And so, as a result of your five years' education in the world, ye bring home a jailbird's daughter as your wife!”

Yet there was another side to it. The fact that Jess was the daughter of a convict homicide was no fault of hers. It did not alter the fact that she was a sweet, innocent, lovable little woman. Her father's outcast situation accounted for much that was unusual, and even charming, about her. It explained why she had never been allowed to live the life of that world which was ready to point the finger of scorn at her father's daughter. The ex-convict had kept her, as in a convent, within the four walls of the little home that held his secret and his only chance for comparative happiness. Her education consisted of what he had been able to teach her himself and what

she had derived from reading the well-chosen books that filled the shelves of the reading room.

She was not to be blamed; rather did she appeal to my heart more warmly for the need she had of at least an ordinary share of human love and companionship.

But what of her father?

Here again I could not summon enough of anything to stir antipathy. He had killed a man, a man who had destroyed his home and happiness and virtually murdered Jess's mother, a man for whose particular crime—than which there is none more atrocious—the law provided no adequate penalty. I could almost regard Jess's father as the scapegoat of the law's inefficiency.

He had already suffered a penalty perhaps far beyond his act's deserts. He had stood in the shadow of the gibbet and suffered the agonies of the rope a thousand times in tortured imagination. Actual death had been commuted to living death—life servitude. Then the law had perpetrated its most exquisite refinement of brutality. For some reason, it had released the broken-spirited bird from its cage and let it go free—*free* to be jeered by its own kind and pecked and hunted to the silent places of homelessness and starvation.

Yet here a disconcerting thought occurred. While I knew that this cosy little home could last only as long as the neighbours were ignorant of Bunthorne's identity, I saw no signs of poverty, rather of a moderate affluence.

Where did Bunthorne get his money? How did he make a living?

It may be difficult to believe that all these thoughts passed through my mind in the few seconds while I shook hands with Jess's father; but they did, even as a voyage around the world may be lived in the dream of a minute. The brain does not employ cumbersome language. Given a certain clear situation, the mind's eye sees, reasons, and comprehends all the details that make for the whole, even as does the actual eye when turned upon a landscape. And that question of how Bunthorne made a living flashed in the brainpan and illuminated all that pertained to it.

While Bunthorne, as David Millard, had told me of a portion of his past, he had given me no clue to his present means of self-support. He had been a convict; that he had admitted. He was still a convict, at least in the eyes of the world which would not permit him to stop in one place for any length of time (at least, if it knew he was there) and thus did not afford him a chance to redeem himself as an honest, industrious man, asking only to be permitted to earn his living.

What, then, was Bunthorne's business? How did he make a living if, as I surmised, he had cut himself off from all associations of his former life and had no private income? I found myself wondering if it was through the medium of that little bag that he supported himself and his daughter, if it was with the aid of false beards and the implements which I had long ago suspected he carried o' nights in that leather satchel.

If it was by criminal means, could he be altogether

blamed when the world offered no alternative? But, alas—poor Jess!

She, innocent of all that was passing in my mind, conscious only, perhaps, that the meeting between her father and me was fraught with a certain awkwardness, hastened to smooth matters. In a few moments we were seated, the father silent and ill at ease, I stricken dumb by the many thoughts that were flickering like cinematograph pictures in my mind, Jess talking rapidly, carelessly, and at random.

Presently she ceased with a little sigh, as if the task of manufacturing talk proved too much for her inventive faculty. Then her father stirred and seemed to bring his eyes to mine with an effort.

I wondered if now he would recognize me, despite the changes of five years. But apparently he did not.

"My daughter tells me that you have travelled much," said he.

I admitted it.

"You have been a sailor, perhaps?"

"Among other things."

He sighed a little and a wistful look came into his eyes.

"Ah—to travel," he said. "To be young and free. That is to live, indeed. I have always held that desire nearest my own heart, Mr.—Mr. Sheffield. But my adventuring—in travel—has seldom taken me far from my own hearthside. I have travelled much in books—from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, you know; but to see the local habitations—the lion at the pool, 'the Sultan's turret in a noose of light'—that is something that has been denied me."

He smiled, and the smile lightened his colourless, flabby face in a pleasing way. I took advantage of the cue thus offered and discoursed in an offhand way of strange lands and adventures. He listened with increasing interest and forgetfulness of self, his eyes gauging me while they occasionally turned upon Jess, and he seemed to be studying us both.

"You do not think of perhaps returning to—say, South America, and settling there—away from Scotland?" he presently asked.

I laughed.

"No. I've had enough of wandering. I think Scotland will do for the rest of my life, if settling down is to be considered."

His face fell slightly. He seemed to lose interest until I made a reference to the island of Trinidad. He looked up.

"Ah. You have been in Trinidad? Did you ever happen to meet there a young man named John——"

It was my own name—my father's name, too. But I rallied from the slight shock of hearing it again. After all, there was nothing unnatural about his remembering the young man of the public house and connecting his name with Trinidad. Now I thought surely he would recognize me. I decided, however, not to help him to that end—at least in Jess's presence. It would not be an opportune moment for the father.

"Yes," I said, after a pretence of recalling, "I do remember a fellow of that name—a wild bit of a devil who spent most of his time where the temperature was highest."

Bunthorne smiled, reminiscently.

"It might be the same. I once met him. I liked him. He was wild, as you say, but very fair—fair-minded. What became of him?"

"It would be hard to tell you. He left Trinidad rather suddenly, I believe. Got mixed up in a revolution or something over in Venezuela. It was rumoured that he was captured, and they offer short shrift to the loser there."

"Too bad. Too bad. I liked him," said Bunthorne, simply.

There was a lull in the conversation after that. Jess tried to fill it, but her effort failed in spontaneity.

"And you do not think of going abroad again—to settle, I mean? Scotland offers few opportunities nowadays for youth and ambition."

"No. I have other plans. My father has a well-established business here, and——"

"Ah!" interrupted Bunthorne. "Then you *live* in Glasgow?"

"I probably will. At present I am merely a lodger at the Crown, on St. George's Road."

"Where?" asked Bunthorne, sharply.

"At the Crown Tavern, on St. George's Road."

"Do you know any one there?"

"Not a soul."

"Just living there—by accident—as it were?" said he, eyeing me rather keenly, although he spoke indifferently.

"The accident of casual choice."

There was another uncomfortable pause. Jess had given up in despair. I had nothing to say. Bun-

thorne, on his side, sat nervously playing with his fat fingers and looking at me with a kind of pathetic inquiry, as if there were something he wished, but feared, to ask.

Suddenly he got up. Without meeting my gaze or offering to shake hands, he moved toward the door by which he had entered.

"I will say good-night," he barely muttered over his shoulder. "We retire early. I—— We have enjoyed your visit. You will—excuse me, I hope."

"I am afraid I have stayed too long," I said, embarrassed by the manner of his leave-taking. "I am glad to have made your acquaintance."

"You will put out the lights and lock up, Jess," was all he said. Then he closed the door after him, leaving his daughter and me facing each other and considerably nonplussed.

"I'd better go," I said.

"I suppose you had," she agreed. I could see her underlip quiver. She was on the verge of tears.

"Don't worry, little Jess," I said, laying a hand upon her shoulder. "As you said, your father is a little peculiar, but perhaps I understand him better than you do. Anyway, I have made his acquaintance and, although I did not hear him invite me, I dare-say I can come again."

She shook her head, hopelessly, and led me to the front door.

"Good-night," she said, dully.

There was that in her voice which bade me be silent and go. I went away, feeling like an unwelcome guest summarily dismissed. Yet I understood

the situation better than Jess did, and my heart was heavier for them than for myself.

The man had formally met me in his own home. He would have avoided the meeting had he been able to do so without exciting Jess's wonder and my suspicion. He had, I somehow believed, liked me. He had seen that I liked Jess and that Jess liked me. The earnest look in his eyes when he asked me if I did not think of settling abroad had not escaped me. It meant just this:

"I would not be displeased if you and Jess married and you took her away from me and all that pertains to me."

But I was not yet so sure of the permanency of my love for Jess as to contemplate that solution. It would involve leaving my father and mother forever, if indeed it did not make it impossible for me to return to them now. If I tried to explain about Jess, my mother, woman-like, would want to see her; my father, man-like, would want to know about her antecedents.

Well, it had resolved itself into this: I must either dismiss from my life the very existence of Jess Bunthorne and her father and continue the interrupted progress of the prodigal's return, or let Fate lead me blindly into whatever was to follow—*with Jess*.

Poor Jess! What a brutal situation for her to be left in. She had done nothing to deserve it. She did not know the nature of the chains that shackled her eager feet. She did not even know that chains existed, except that something—something stood between her and her simplest aspirations.

Thoroughly depressed I returned to the Crown Tavern. I entered the bar, feeling the need of some cheer even of an artificial nature. A man, somewhat stimulated by frequent applications of the same solace, was leaning over the counter and engaged in a confidential tête-à-tête with a handsome, hard-faced, smiling barmaid.

As the man casually side-glanced at me, I saw that it was the person of whom I had caught a glimpse on the previous evening, after he had registered as "H. Jonson . . . Liverpool."

At that quick side-glance, Mr. Jonson immediately straightened up and brought down his fist on the bar with a violence that made the glasses rattle.

"*Cap-tain Kettle!*" he howled.

Then he laid down his head on the bar and gave an imitation of being quite overcome with emotion.

"Beloved Eyes!" he cried to the astonished barmaid. "Look at him! Gaze upon him! Come around and lay thy fair lips upon his noble brow. Weep with me, O sister! Wipe my eyes, little one!"

Suddenly he stood up and faced me.

"Jack!" he yelled. "You finicky, old, preachin' son of a *padre!* Don't you know me?"

Then I recognized him, despite the short moustache and the "mutton-chops."

It was my mate of many a land and sea, the Devil's Island man—Joseph Aloysius Byrnes.

CHAPTER VIII

WHO IS THE MAN?

IT WAS that unhappy poet, James Thomson, who spoke of "the supreme indifference of Fate." I can hardly be convinced that that director of things we usually attribute to chance was in the least indifferent to anything but my feelings. I can fancy that god as a kind of malignant humourist, weaving simple webs and being convulsed with unholy laughter as human beings wander into the very thick of them.

In my own case, meeting Joe Byrnes again was but stumbling upon a fresh strand of the invisible web. Like the stupid fly I clutched at it as a temporary means of relief from other anxieties and became further entangled.

While Byrnes was tolerable, even mildly amusing, in the world of vagabondia, I would not have chosen him even as a temporary companion in anything else. He was a born criminal. To steal was first nature with him; to be honest was a course adopted when the innate instinct saw no opportunity for exercise.

It was not unnatural, however, that I should be a little glad to see him that night. I had not yet emerged from vagabondia. I was still attired and appearing generally as he had last seen me in New

York some months before. He was, after all, an old comrade to whom something was due.

Aside from the fact that he might temporarily divert me from the problem of Jess and her father, I was curious to know how Byrnes came to be in Glasgow and in the very place where I was staying.

"Sssh!" he warned me with a violent wink. "I'm here, Kettle. Let that be enough as between pals.

"Beauteous damsel!" he cried, turning to the handsome, hard-faced lady with the set smile, "when the Governor of North Carolina met the Governor of South Carolina——"

He finished the drouthy anecdote with an eloquent wave of his hand. While the barmaid attended to business, Joe rattled on to her about my personality, virtues, and achievements. He seemed afraid to address me directly in her presence.

"You wouldn't think now," said he, with mock grandiloquence, "that my friend here is the niftiest guy about clothes that ever sat under a awning, aft. You don't believe it, my dear? Well, look at this." He took a packet of miscellanies from an inside pocket and presently clapped an oblong of paper upon the bar. The high priestess of Bacchus condescended to gaze upon a photographic print of me, taken by Byrnes aboard the old tramp steamer. It showed me reclining in a deck chair with a *cigarrito* sticking out from my trimmed beard, and with my legs idly crossed. I was reading a book which I had borrowed from the captain.

"He's chock *full* of education," Joseph Aloysius

assured the bar lady. "But he ain't stuck up—except for being too blamed particular about some things. Still, he ain't ashamed of his pals. If you don't beleve it, look at this one, Beautiful Lady. Skinny Olafsen, the cook, squeezed the rubber bubble and thinks he took the picture, but it was me that fixed it before I stepped in and leaned up against my nifty friend."

The picture was as Joe described it. It showed the two of us jauntily leaning shoulder to shoulder, an arm about each other.

"My! Isn't it the very likeness of both of you," said the smiling lady.

"Well, you see, it's supposed to *be* us," Byrnes explained, gravely. "And you wouldn't think, now, to look at him," he added, holding a third print in his hand but carefully concealing the interesting side, "that my friend here is just as nifty with his mitts when it comes to a showdown. Now would you, Angel-face?"

"He doesn't look like a ill-tempered gentleman," said Angel-face, coquettishly rolling her well-trained orbs in my direction.

"Well, look at that!" cried Byrnes, triumphantly, thrusting the third picture right under the barmaid's slightly *retroussé* nose.

"Well, I declare!" the lady gasped, and her eyes brightened with a glow of genuine admiration which presently shone upon me. "Is that a real photy-graft?"

"Let me see that?" said I, wondering what the picture might be. The barmaid yielded it up. At

the first look I was struck with astonishment and something more.

Momentarily I was transported back to Coffin Island in the Bonin group. I was on the beach in a hand-to-hand encounter with Jermyn, the mate. I could hear the breeze in the bush and the sigh of the sea. Likewise I was hungry, being filled with nothing but a desire to kill the first officer if I could. I remembered the click of Byrnes's camera as I delivered that telling blow on the point of Jermyn's jaw.

Here was the result of that click. It was the most animated snapshot I had ever seen. The flash of the camera diaphragm had caught and suspended the very pith of action. My face was hard, my eyes distended. My right arm was levelled straight from the shoulder to where the fist was in strong contact with Jermyn's jaw. His head was slightly set back and uplifted by the force of the blow. He was balanced on a single heel and his body was at a backward falling angle.

It was quite a remarkable picture—one of those lucky snapshots that the amateur photographer afterward attributes to his personal, artistic skill, as Byrnes was boasting his now.

He finished by taking a handful of sovereigns from his pockets and dropping one through his fingers on to the bar.

"Set 'em up again, Light of the Harem!" said Byrnes, recklessly. "Make it fizzy water this time, Peachbloom. This is what you might call a *auspicious* occasion."

"It looks like *sus*-picious coin, Byrnes," said I.

"Cut it!" said he, sharply. "Let's sit down."

Indifferently I went with him to a table in a corner. It was history repeating itself. My lot seemed cast in the path of convicts. But this time it was a jailbird of a very different type from Millard.

"Well, how did *you* get here?" I asked, a little wearily.

"How, Kettle? Well, you see, they're running steamboats between New York and Liverpool now. Gee-whiz! To think it's you, you blamed old aristocratic beachcomber. Ain't it a funny world?"

"Queer, you mean. I grant you. Was New York too hot?"

"Hot! Say, I take it all back about the fly cops of Manhattanville. They were on to me in two days. I forgot about that lit'rary fo-par in 'Frisco. If it hadn't been for the bunch—it was them gave me the tip—I'd be languishing in Sing Sing right now. The gumshoes didn't want me for beating Devil's Island. Far be it! In fact, I was a seven-days' hero around Forty-second and Broadway and I told the whole story to Chief Saltus himself, and he was tickled to death the way we did up the Frenchies.

"But he gave me warning that I had to be good. The way his little Willies kept tabs on me would ha' sickened a grand op'ra tenor. I pulled off a little thing, needin' the money—something a parson wouldn't 'a' thought more'n a venyal sin—and they came buzzin' down on me like a beehive wi' the lid off.

"The bunch staked me over the line to Canada and I got a Scotch liner out of St. John for Glasgow.

Any other place was good enough for my health and Scotland looked real salubrious.

"Say, Kettle," he broke off, "would you have known me if I hadn't spoke?"

"Yes, if I'd had a square look at you. I thought I'd seen you before when you registered last night."

"You don't say!" He was quite discomfited. "It took me a month to grow the grass. But that don't matter. I once did time here, but they've got nothing on me now."

"Perhaps not yet," said I. "But what's the new game?"

He looked around and glanced at the barmaid, who was prinking at the mirror behind the bar.

"Oh, it's a soft thing," said he. "Safe as a judgment—which is what it is, too." He chuckled.

"A judgment?"

"Yep. And I'm the judge for once. But it ain't any use, Kettle. You and me's just social acquaintances. Nothing doing any more in business confidences. You go away to your Sunday School and I won't butt in on the class."

"That's satisfactory to me, Byrnes. You aren't a bad sort on the whole, but I want you to understand that I have some pretty decent relations in this town, though I haven't had time to look 'em up as yet. I don't propose to become mixed up with the police through being in your company. You'll excuse straight language, I hope?"

"Now don't go to throwing sermon juice on this joyful reunion," said Byrnes, distinctly aggrieved. "As I said before, we're only social acquaintances."

I'm Joe Byrnes to you and you're Cap'n Kettle to me. What's your real name and what's mine is nothing to either of us. But I give you my word, I could walk into the arms of the main police squeeze here and while he might not love me enough to kiss my fair cheek, he would have the honesty to say, 'Go away, Joseph. I don't want you.'"

"But how long will that last, Byrnes? You admit that you have some game on now."

"But I told you it was safe as a judgment!" he protested.

I could not help laughing. He was incorrigible.

"Well," he said, thoughtfully, "it's safe till it busts, anyway, and I don't think that'll be for a while. In the meantime, Kettle, old hog, for the sake of them dear, dead days, do me a favour. Take me somewhere. Show me the high spots of your smoky borough. I've never been around Glasgow—socially. Cherry Blossom there is cold and virtuous and says I'm heading straight for a bend. Do your duty by an old pal and show me your native village. I've got the price."

"So have I, and if I agree—for to-night only, you understand—you'll keep that gold of yours out of sight."

"I'll give it to the Police Benevolent Society, if you say so," declared Byrnes, eager for a night of it.

"Well, come on. Let's eat somewhere first. Then we'll take in a variety show. After that——"

"After that?" cackled Byrnes.

"Oh, the deluge!" I said, recklessly, for the wine had dissipated the evening's troublesome reflections.

Also, the resurrection of a vagabond mate and the vagabond spirit had arrived together.

"Good-night, Star-Eyes!" cried Joe Byrnes to the lady of the bar. "Me and Captain Kettle are about to study the night-life of your dark metrollopus. Sweet dreams, little one! Prithee send a few buckets of cracked ice to our chambers ere the morrow's dawn. *Adios, carissima!* Father's given us a sixpence wherewith to see life——"

"Shut up!" I interrupted.

He did not know that there was sixpence with a hole in it in a pocket of my waistcoat. I had seen life with it and here I was, back, almost at my father's door, improved in some respects, but——

"Come on!" I said, almost savagely, passing out into the lamp-lighted street with the escaped Devil's Island convict at my heels.

There is no occasion to describe the doings of that night. The description would not be elevating. I am ashamed of it to this day. The latter part of it I do not remember. It was, to be candid and brief, a debauch from which I awoke in my room at the Crown, sick, self-humiliated, and generally despairing. I was hardly able to lift my head from the pillow.

I turned over with a groan of remorse. I thought of Jess, of my mother, and lastly of the sort of man with whom I had roystered in the midnight streets of my native city. Three things I decided as I lay there: I was done with Byrnes. I was also done with the Bunthornes. As soon as I was fit and able, I would arise and go to my father.

I fell asleep again. This time it was a natural

sleep, deep and nerve-restoring. When I awoke the sunlight, streaming into the room with a golden tint, told me that the afternoon was well advanced.

I got up, feeling much better, but with a dull headache. The latter modified after repeated applications of cold water. I sat on the edge of the bed and leisurely dressed. Presently my eyes fell upon an envelope that had been shoved under the door while I slept. It had come by post and was addressed to

JOHN SHEFFIELD, ESQ.
CROWN TAVERN,
ST. GEORGE'S ROAD
GLASGOW

I knew at once that it was from Jess. Her father would scarcely write me, I thought. None other, except Byrnes, knew me as Sheffield, or that such a person was in the city. . . . It was from Jess, sure enough. It bore neither date nor the address from which it had been written. It began simply:

DEAR JACK: My father says you are not what you pretend to be, that you would only bring unhappiness into our home if he let you come again, and that I must not continue to know you. He will not explain why he says these things.

But what am I to do? Your visit this evening was uncomfortable enough (for you, at least). What would it be if you came against his wishes? Yet you *shall* see me if you still wish to. I have never disobeyed my father before. I have always done his bidding without question. But something has come over me since yesterday on the steamer. I feel that he ought to tell me, not necessarily all the things I now want to know, but just this one—why I may

not keep the first and only friend I have ever had, or wanted. I mean you.

There is another thing. You remember I spoke of a visitor besides yourself to-day? Perhaps when I see you again—for I shall at least want to say thank you and good-bye—I will tell you more about this man. I do not think his coming here was a good thing for my father. He has not been himself since the man came. My father thinks you are a friend of this man, who is also staying at the Crown Tavern, and that is one reason why he does not want me to know you further.

Please do this for me. Find out who this man is if you do not know already. My father thinks you do. I opened the door when he came, and he said his name was Jonson and he was an old friend of the family. He spoke a little like you do sometimes, only roughly. I think he has lived abroad.

When I told my father about the man at the door, he went into the front room and looked at this Jonson through the window and from behind the curtains. Then he told me to let him in, but his face was terribly white and he was all shaking.

Afterward, they went into my father's bedroom and I think they quarrelled, for I heard their voices very loud. When the man came out he was laughing. My father did not go with him to the door. He stayed in his room and walked up and down for hours until you came. Then he came out and wanted to know if it was the same man before he would let me ask you in.

Find out who this man is and what is his business. It may help me to understand things. If I only understood, perhaps I could in some way help my father. I know he is in trouble and he is terribly distressed about something. And oh, Jack, I need someone to help me, too; yet he says I must not have you for my friend.

If you could find out about that man I could meet you to-night somewhere. Sometimes after dark my father and I walk in the Park, although he seldom lets me out in the daytime. If my father does not accompany me—and he doesn't when he has his moods—I will be at the park gate between eight and nine o'clock. Will you come to me there, Jack? I need someone to talk to and I trust you, somehow.

JESS.

This letter had a certain incoherence about it, as if it were dictated by a mind at loss for words in which to express some half-formed fear. But I believed that I saw light where Jess did not.

The man Jonson was undoubtedly Byrnes. He apparently knew Bunthorne, *alias* Millard. What the relationship might be I could only guess. It might be a partnership in roguery, renewed or about to be renewed. Possibly it was blackmail.

In any event, Jess's dreaded "man" was the Devil's Island convict. Whatever Byrnes's game, it was causing Jess annoyance. That feature, at least, must be eliminated.

For the rest, I realized all at once that the whole affair was one in which my father's son had no right or reason to be involved. I would see Jess at the park gate, as she had suggested. I would console her as best I could and, unless there should develop any stronger reason for a contrary course, I would say good-bye and proceed to Rothelay in the morning.

In the meantime—Byrnes.

I carefully destroyed the letter. Perhaps Jess had been indiscreet to write it. I finished dressing, went

downstairs, and asked at the desk for Mr. Jonson. The clerk, with a knowing smile, nodded toward the bar.

Byrnes was seated alone at a table. His eyes were heavy and his face the colour of soiled flannel. He was trying to recuperate with the aid of champagne pints.

"So *there* you are," he said, thickly. "If you feel as I do, you ought to be half way to the morgue. Orange-Blossom—we will now resume."

"Nothing to drink, if you please," I said to the barmaid.

I stood over Byrnes and addressed him quietly.

"You know Chamber's Close?"

He looked up with a slight clearing of his eyes.

"Well, what about Chamber's Close?"

"You were there yesterday?"

"What if I was?"

"And it was *he* gave you the money?"

"What d'you know about it—or him?" Byrnes inquired with a slow narrowing of his eyes.

"Perhaps more than would be convenient for me to share with you, Byrnes. I know the man and I know—what most people don't know about him."

"Oh, you do, eh?" said the Devil's Island man, his mouth slowly expanding into a grin. "So you know what he is? But how in thunder did you find out? But say, Kettle, *can you beat it?*"

"Beat it?" I echoed. "I don't know what you mean. Anyway, you are in the same boat yourself, and if I had to choose between one convict and another, I'd choose Bunthorne for the better man."

"Convict!" said Byrnes. "Who's talking about——" He stopped short and a light seemed to dawn upon his mind. "Oh, is *that* all you know about him?"

He began to shake with silent laughter. I perceived that I was in deeper waters than I had even suspected.

"I don't pretend, or want, to know anything at all about who he is or what his business may be," I said; "only, there's a girl in this and she's the main sufferer."

"You mean, she's the main *squeeze*," said Byrnes, winking at me as he filled his glass and drained it almost at one swallow.

"So I suspect now, you d—d coward!" I said, hotly, for it was now clear that Jess was the handle of the instrument of Byrnes's power over Bunthorne.

The Devil's Island man got to his feet and we stood face to face. The barmaid was watching us closely and, I suspected, listening. There was apparently little anger in Byrnes, but his eyes narrowed again.

"So that's it, Kettle," said he, with an evil smile. "I always knew you had your price, and I somehow figured that it would be a woman."

"Now look here," he went on; "whether you know enough about who and what Mister Whatever-He-Calls-Himself is, I don't know. You haven't told me. But *I* saw him first and I've got him where I want him. *You* keep off. If it's the woman you want, say the word. I'll hand her to you as a gift from one pal to another."

My only comment on this was to yield to an im-

pulse of contempt and white-hot rage. . . .
Poor little Jess!

I struck Byrnes across the face with the flat of my hand, but driven with all the force of my shoulder. He reeled backward and collapsed in the corner, carrying with him table, chair, glasses, and bottles.

Then I marched out by the street door of the bar, leaving the Crown Tavern in something of an uproar.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE LIGHTS A WAY

I DID not return to the Crown Tavern; it was decreed that I never should cross its threshold again; yet I felt no misgiving as I left it.

I was glad that I had made a breach between Byrnes and myself. Presently I would sever relations with the Bunthornes, and to-morrow I would turn a page and make a new beginning on spotless respectability.

There was a selfish hope in me that Jess would allow the parting to be without difficulty. If only she were less innocent, less willing to act upon my very suggestion; if only I could find a little justification for blaming her, some little excuse for resentment, how much easier it would be to say good-bye.

It was a cowardly way of thinking, and my conscience told me so. It was dodging the issue, visiting upon her blameless head the sins of the father. It did not speak eloquently for the quality of my affection; yet the very aching of my conscience was born of that love.

I tried to stifle conscience and convince myself that this love was the fancy of a day, something that it was better to nip in the bud for Jess's sake as well as my own. Under the circumstances marriage with

her would result in nothing but a little happiness and much later misery for both of us, unless, as Bunthorne had subtly suggested, I took myself and my bride to the other side of the world, away from the shadow that enveloped the father and obscured Jess's chances of happiness.

But I should see her once more. That thought was pleasant. If I could only tell her I cared; if I could take her in my arms and kiss her just once, it would be a sort of relief. But none of these things must I do if the parting of the ways was to be reached and passed with no danger to our after-peace.

It was the obligation to my father and mother that stiffened my determination. I had returned to Scotland strong in good resolutions. I had never brought much joy to my father or credit to his name in the past; the more reason I should consider these things now. And this hint of Byrnes's, that there was more behind the mystery of Daniel Bunthorne than merely his having been a convicted man-killer, was the last straw.

But what could it be? Byrnes was blackmailing him: of that I was sure. Upon what ground? A person with Byrnes's record could hardly succeed in extracting hush-money from a fellow-convict. A man of Byrnes's continued criminal activity would surely not dare apply the screws to one who had satisfied justice and was trying to lead an honest life. The advantage of the one over the other seemed rather on Bunthorne's side.

No. There was deeper matter here. Bunthorne must be engaged in some practice so nefarious that

a man wanted by the police of half a dozen countries could still bleed him for silence. But what criminal secret could be darker than Byrnes's own? It was not as if the Devil's Island man had expiated all his own offences—burglary, swindling, bank robbery, blackmail—perhaps murder, for all I knew or had reason to suppose to the contrary. Bunthorne must be involved in something worse than any of these to allow Byrnes a grip upon him.

Promptly at eight o'clock I was at the park gate. I had to wait about forty minutes. While I loitered about the entrance, smoking a cigar, a policeman favoured me with several glances. The last time he eyed me he paused to remark that it was a pleasant evening.

Just as he did so, Jess appeared. I did not know her at first, for she wore a dark veil. The policeman saw her before I did. He saluted and with a glance at Jess, marched on as he had been going. Then Jess spoke to me. I threw away the cigar and together we entered the park.

"Let us find a seat—some place where it is quiet," she said.

We found a sequestered spot, a bench set in the shadow of some rhododendron bushes at an inturn of the path. Not until we were secluded there did Jess raise her veil.

"Do you always go—disguised?" I asked, with an assumption of lightness.

"It is another whim of my father's," she said, with not a little bitterness.

The conviction that Bunthorne's situation was

more delicate than I had first believed grew upon me. Indeed, as far back as the incident of the stevedore disguise, I had thought that Bunthorne somewhat exaggerated the importance of having been a convict. The matter of keeping his daughter in seclusion during daylight and veiling her upon her evening excursions savoured a little of the ridiculous.

"Have you found out?" Jess asked, abruptly.

"Found out—what?"

"About the man."

I immediately found myself in a quandary. I knew about Byrnes, as I knew about her father, by chance. Had I the right to reveal what I knew about either of them? Was it any of my business? And if I told her about Byrnes it would be difficult to refrain from telling about her father.

"Did you see him?"

"Ye-es."

"Did you know him?"

"Mm-yes."

"Who is he? What is his name?"

"I don't know what his real name is."

Jess was looking at me, rather keenly.

"You had known him before." It was a statement rather than a question.

To this I made no answer at all. Jess's face became very white against the dark veil drawn up on her brow. She suddenly arose from the bench.

"I see," she said, coldly. "My father was right. You knew the man. You are in league with him. . . . Good-bye. I thought you were my friend."

She started to walk away. For a moment I was

tempted to let her go. Chance had neatly created the means of separation. But I could not let her last thought of me be that I was a double-dealer.

I called to her. She turned and spoke from a little distance.

"Are you my friend or not?"

"Hadn't you better try me?"

She slowly returned. No sooner was she seated than, woman-like, she came back to the question.

"Who is the man?"

In no time she had it out of me, not only that I knew her father's visitor, but that I had known him before. I was able to assure her, however, that I had not known of his visit to Chamber's Close or that he had any dealings or even acquaintance with her father until I got her letter.

"What is his business with my father? What common interest can my father have with a man of that type?"

"I don't know," I answered, truthfully.

"But you suspect. I know you do."

"Jess," I said, quite unable to withstand her directness without resorting to lies, "Fate has dragged me into this, to what end I do not know. If I seem to hesitate in revealing the little I know, it is because I am not sure that I have a right to divulge certain things that, coming to me by chance and not concerning me in the least, are other people's private affairs."

"Even if they concern me," she said. "Well, I have no right to disturb the comfort of your sense of honour."

"Not that. If I thought telling you would make you—any less unhappy. I would do anything to help you, Jess."

"Nothing can make me more unhappy than I have been in the last two days."

"That is precisely why I was going to tell you."

"Forgive me," she almost whispered after a long pause. . . . "Then what is this man's business with my father?"

"I think it is blackmail."

If I had expected her to be stirred by this, I was agreeably disappointed.

"That is the conclusion I had reached, too," she said, quietly. "Blackmail is when one must pay or have something unpleasant disclosed—isn't it? Well, I have decided that there is something—unpleasant—in my father's life and that he is hiding it from the world—and me."

She turned suddenly and laid her hands appealingly on my left arm.

"Jack," she said, and her voice was moving with appeal, "just tell me again that you are my friend, that you are not with this man against my father. Just say, 'Jess, I would not take advantage of your trust.'"

I said it, and more.

"I wouldn't do anything to hurt you, Jess, or let anybody else do anything."

"Then I am going to tell you all I know," she said, "and perhaps then you can see, as I do not, the answer to what is puzzling me—what the thing is that my father takes such pains to hide and which, I am sure, this man has found out."

I felt like a hypocrite for a moment. I could have said, "Jess, your father was a convict. He murdered a man"—and it would have been enough for her, no doubt, as it had been for me—at first. But the feeling passed. After all, it was *not* the matter of Bunthorne's having been a jailbird that gave Byrnes his grip. Byrnes had as good as said so.

"Perhaps you're right, Jess. It may help me to understand. If I can see anything clear I will tell you."

"Thank you," she said, and then she told me briefly the story of an empty life.

She had no recollection of her mother. Her earliest remembrance was of being in some sort of home where there were a number of children, none of whom had more than a Christian name. They were ill-fed and dressed all alike in gingham. Women, other than those who were regularly there, sometimes came and read stories to the children and brought little presents at Christmas-time.

"It was, I think, an orphan asylum," she said, "but I have no idea where it was. Sometimes a man and a woman would come and we were all lined up for inspection. Then one of our number would be picked out and we would not see that child again. I think many were adopted.

"I remember one time a rich lady picked me out and kissed me. I thought then that my turn had come to have a mother and pretty clothes and plenty to eat; but something went wrong. Perhaps the rich lady changed her mind."

There came a fullness to my throat as Jess told me

this. It seemed clear enough to me what had gone wrong. Quietly I slipped a protecting arm around Jess's shoulders and drew her closer to me. She fell silent but did not resist.

"Go on," I said, presently. The rest of her story she told with her head almost on my shoulder and her hair brushing my cheek.

When she was ten years old she was one day summoned to the matron's office. There was a man there. He was very pale and nervous. The matron was very severe in her attitude toward this man. She told Jess that the man was her father and that he had come to take her away.

"The man—it was my father—took me from the asylum. Since then we have lived together. He has been good to me, although strange in many ways. He would never speak of my mother, except to say that she died when I was a baby. He said he had been abroad all these years, and I was very much surprised, Jack, when he told you last night that he had never travelled and had always wished to. Perhaps he forgot."

Her story affected me strangely. Perhaps proximity had something to do with it, fanning my half-awakened love into a flame of tenderness. I only know that I slowly turned my head and quietly touched her brow with my lips. She stirred ever so slightly.

"Jack," she whispered, "why did you do that?"

"I don't know—except that I am very fond of you."

"I'm glad," she said, simply. "I am, too—of you."

She then told me about the next twelve years of her life—inserting naïvely that she was now twenty-two.

“He would never consent to my going to school, but taught me everything himself. He brought me every present that a girl would love, except fine dresses. I think now he dressed me plainly so that I should not want to go out. I knew I was dowdy and never wanted to go anywhere on that account. That was a special new dress I had on the day I went on the steamer. It was the best I ever had. Perhaps you—you noticed it.”

I lied like a gentleman.

It appeared that he gave her books and magazines, but would not allow a newspaper in the house. He said they contained only lies or unnecessary records of the unpleasant things of life.

“And did you always live in Chamber’s Close?”

“No. That is the strangest part. We have been there quite a long time, but yesterday he said that we were going to move again. We have never lived as long in one place before, or in the same town. Once we lived in England, and we have lived in about twenty places in Scotland. The longest we ever stayed in one house before Chamber’s Close was a year in a cottage away in the Highlands, where we seldom saw a living soul, and it rained all the time.”

“What an existence for a girl! But you said you had never seen the sea.”

“I never happened to—before that day,” said Jess. “We always travelled by train and at night.”

A thought occurred to me.

"Tell me, Jess. When he travelled like that with you, did he—was he dressed ordinarily?"

"Strange that you should ask that. He was not. He always wore a big coat and a heavy muffler and a cap with earflaps tied under his chin. He said he had a cold. He was always catching cold, and that was the reason he had to have a change of air so often."

"So," was all I could say.

So far, everything she had told me tallied with my first theory, that Bunthorne was nothing but an ex-convict trying to escape from the shadow of himself. But the changing and travelling seemed unnecessarily frequent and must have cost considerable money and inconvenience.

"What is your father's business, Jess?"

"Business? I don't know. He hasn't any. I never thought of that. Lots of people haven't any business. When the census man came last year he was put down as a 'gentleman'."

"But surely even a gentleman has some affiliations. Does he never go out, or have visitors, or receive post letters? Surely!"

"Perhaps. In fact, I think perhaps he *has* some business. But he never gets letters, at least by the post, and he seldom has any one come to see him. I might say no one ever comes—except the soldier man."

"Who's he?"

"Oh, that's only my nickname for him. He doesn't wear a uniform, but he is so very stiff and sharp. I don't what he is, but he must be a close friend of my father, for the soldier man always knows where he is. He comes now and then, sometimes not

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for months, then he will come as often as twice in as many weeks. I don't know what they talk about, for my father takes him into his room. I once asked my father if he thought it wouldn't be fun to ask the soldier man to stay and have tea, and——”

“And?”

“I don't know. My father went into his room and slammed the door after him.”

The incident seemed to have made little impression upon her, possibly because she saw nothing odd where all was unusual.

“Had you ever seen the man, Jonson, or Byrnes, before he came to the house yesterday?” I presently asked.

“No. With the exception of the soldier man, there was never a visitor that I had ever seen before.”

“Where there any other—strangers?”

“Only one besides the Jonson man. But that was so long ago, when I was about twelve. One day a man came into the house without knocking. He must have had a key and been a friend of my father.”

“What sort of man was he?”

“He was a clergyman. He walked right past me and into my father's room. I thought he was out, but apparently he wasn't, for in a little while he came out of his room. I asked him who the clergyman was. He just said that he had gone. I was only twelve at the time. But I remember my father saying that he did not like people walking in like that and we must have a chain put on the door.”

“Did it occur to you that that might have been your father himself?”

"I don't know. Why should he dress like a clergyman? But I sometimes think it may have been, for the man carried my father's bag, and he is very particular about that."

"He always carries it when he goes out?"

"Nearly always. And he always keeps it locked. I know, because I once tried to find out what was in it—when I was a little girl, you know."

I would have given a great deal to know what was in it, myself. Had I known then—what things would not have happened!

"Does he go out often?"

"Not often, except for a walk after dark with me. When he goes away—on business, or whatever it is takes him—he goes in the evening, stays away two or three days, and always comes back in the night."

I could think of nothing more to ask her and she could think of nothing more to tell me.

"Do you understand it?" she asked.

"No," I said, after some thought. "Yours is a strange story. It leaves me more in the dark than ever. As you agree, yourself, there is something that your father is trying to hide from the world and particularly from you. Just what it is I cannot say. The thought has occurred to me, Jess, that perhaps he has done something—in his past, you know. But this man, Jonson, has too much on his own escutcheon to make blackmail a safe industry for him."

"You think this Jonson man knows—whatever it is?"

"I am positive. He knows and is making capital of it."

"And you, Jack, are going to find out what he knows," she said, confidently. "Then you and I will find some means to beat him."

I was silent a while.

"Jess," I said, presently, "I am going to be as frank as you have been with me. When I came to meet you to-night, I had decided that the whole affair—the mystery of your father and the matter of Byrnes—was of such a nature that it would be unwise for me to become involved in it. I meant that this should be good-bye between us."

Jess drew herself slowly from my encircling arm. She sat up straight, with her head averted.

"I know it is unpleasant," she said, dully. "I think maybe there is disgrace—yes, disgrace lurking behind it all. I do not blame you for wishing to avoid it. I thank you for your kindness, however. Of course, we are, after all, strangers to one another——"

"Yes," I interrupted, "we are, as the period of acquaintance counts, almost strangers; but love does not take count of time, Jess, does it?"

She turned her head slowly.

"What—did you say, Jack?"

"There is only one way to settle this. It is not by finding out what Jonson, or Byrnes as he calls himself, is doing to your father, but what your father has ever done to provide Byrnes with his grip. I mean to ask your father—that."

"But—but you could not ask *him*!" she gasped. "Remember, he is so strange. He knows you only to suspect you."

"I could clear his mind on that point," I said, remembering what Bunthorne had said of the young man of the Queen's Dock. "But I should demand an explanation."

"Demand! How, Jack? He—he might order you out."

"Hardly. Suppose I said to him, 'Sir, I want to marry Jess. If she wants to marry me, do you know of any reason why I should not become a member of your family?' I think he would have to be specific——"

"Jack!" exclaimed Jess, her face stamped with utter amazement, either at the matter or the suddenness.

"Yes. I mean, in saying what I did, that I love you, Jess. We are being candid to-night, and I am placing the situation in the clearest light for both of us. I knew—last night, I think—that I cared for you. That is why it was in my mind to say good-bye before it might be too late for both of us.

"I have a mother and father, Jess. I have never brought them much joy of their son, but I have yet to bring dishonour upon them. I have to think of them, Jess. I do not ask if you love me. That can wait. It may be that I shall never ask whether you do or not. But for your peace and mine, and for the possibility of future happiness together, I mean to ask your father—to-night—a question that, if he is an honest man, he must answer without equivocation.

"If he is an honest man—and something tells me that he is—I will be more than his friend. I will help

him fight his battle, whatever it is—for your sake more than his, perhaps. But if he should prove otherwise, or refuse to make his position—your position—clear, then, Jess, shall I be doing wrong, even by you, in going my own way?”

“No, Jack, you would not,” said Jess, much stirred. “But—you would do this for me?”

“For you—and me, Jess. I am only asking a clear title to the thing I most want on earth. Let us go now.”

I rose from the bench and helped her to her feet. For a moment we stood face to face in the shadows of the rhododendrons and under a patch of starlit sky.

“Jack,” she whispered, laying her hands upon my shoulders. “You said you might—never ask me, so I—I want to tell you that——”

I suddenly gathered her in my arms and kissed her lips.

“You needn’t, dear. ’Twould be joy to hear, but—I think I know. You are the sweetest, purest, frankest little woman that ever deserved better luck. Thank God, I didn’t go, as I meant to. Forgive me that I ever thought more of myself than of you. Maybe yet, if the worst comes—there’s still South America.”

Arm in arm, all our troubles temporarily forgotten, walking, as it were, in a newly discovered country, we left the park. But I was rudely reawakened to realities when we neared Chamber’s Close.

A man stood smoking under the street lamp on the corner. It was Byrnes, and he was looking up the alley.

I brought Jess to a halt and whispered in her ear. We drew into the shadow of a doorway and watched. Presently Byrnes made a hand-signal to someone up the close and came walking toward us. He passed within a few yards.

"Wait!" I whispered to Jess.

Out of the alley came a man with a peculiar, flat-footed gait and a certain stoop to his shoulders.

"My father!" said Jess in a quick undertone.

Bunthorne, with his chin down on his breast, went past without observing us and followed in the track of Byrnes.

"They are going to meet somewhere away from the house," I said. "Now is my chance, Jess. I may settle this thing to-night. If I can find out what the situation is by observation, I may never need to speak to your father at all. You go home. It's just around the corner. I haven't a moment to spare if I want to get to the bottom of this. Run, now, and good-night—sweetheart."

"Good-night, dear," she said, a little shyly.

She uttered a low, happy laugh as I kissed her again. Half of her troubles seemed to have vanished or taken on a different hue.

"Come to me as soon as you can," she whispered. "You will know best when. I leave everything to you now. Good-night, dear—good-night!"

I watched her until she was engulfed in the shadows of Chamber's Close, then hastened after Byrnes and Bunthorne. They were heading for the park.

CHAPTER X

THE TURN OF THE WORM

MY SENSES were alert as I followed the two convicts between whom lay the secret and the solution of the mystery which was puzzling me and making Jess unhappy.

Newly found love had sent me into the battle; with my own hands I had cast the die. I was in to the end, and that end seemed close at hand. I went to my own fate with an eagerness that must have made the grim god of mischance shriek with laughter.

The situation, as touching the present movements of the principals, was quite apparent. On the previous day, whatever else had happened between Bunthorne and Byrnes, their meeting had been inconvenient for both, no doubt on account of Jess's presence. Byrnes had left the house in the alley probably upon Bunthorne's plea for, or promise of, a meeting outside. As they were heading now, indicated a rendezvous in the park.

I had no doubt that, on the previous day, money had changed hands between the two men. The possession by Byrnes of a quantity of gold coin convinced me of this. It would be like Bunthorne, with all the other peculiarities of his oyster-like existence, to have no bank account, but keep his hoard at home.

That he dealt in gold coin suggested something of the miser. Perhaps he found gold safer, on the other hand, and considered the very number of a banknote a possible clue to his identity. On the previous day, it might be, he had not had enough coin on hand to satisfy Byrnes's demand and had scraped together the rest of the sum in the meantime.

It was eloquent of Byrnes's grip upon Bunthorne the way the two men went toward the rendezvous. I had noted the jaunty air of the Devil's Island man as he smoked under the corner street lamp. There had been something confident about that hand-signal, too. Then Bunthorne had emerged from Chamber's Close with the air of a beaten dog whistled to heel.

Now, as they went through the comparatively deserted streets, Byrnes sauntered along with the cigar in his mouth. A slight unsteadiness of gait suggested that he had mended his hurt feelings at the Crown with more champagne pints. Now and then he cast an eye over his shoulder to assure himself, where assurance might be taken for granted, that his victim was coming along obediently.

Bunthorne walked with a laggard hesitation that spoke volumes for his desire to be going in any other direction and upon any other errand. As I observed the beaten air of his rounded shoulders and bowed head, my heart bled for the man and grew hot for him and Jess against the rascally Byrnes. I had always suspected the possibilities of extreme evil in my former vagabond mate, but until now they had never touched me, personally, or seriously, or without a redeeming touch of comedy.

They entered the park by the gate where I had met Jess. The policeman was not in sight this time, for which I was glad. The same constable might have decided to keep a closer eye on me after a fourth encounter, and I did not wish to be balked in my quest by overzealous espionage.

It was now necessary for me to draw in closer to the game. Byrnes had disappeared around a bend of the winding cement walk among the shrubbery. I quickened my pace and kept Bunthorne in sight. No doubt he had the third man in view.

Presently, at a sharp bend of the path, I saw the glow of Byrnes's cigar, stationary. Just in time to escape observation, I sprang into the shrubbery and saw the two men come to a standstill together. They were beside the very bench which I still associate with my love for Jess, although a less rosy memory is wont to eclipse the romance of it. I stole over the grassy lawn behind the bushes that fringed the cement walk and managed to conceal myself behind a flowering rhododendron, and not ten paces behind the bench.

Byrnes and Bunthorne were sitting down. The Devil's Island man had languidly crossed his legs at full length before him and was apparently determined to finish a very excellent cigar (I caught the aroma of it) before taking up the business in hand. Bunthorne sat forward on the bench, his head hanging down, his arms dangling between his knees, and his fingers twining and untwining. He was the very picture of despair. At last Byrnes tossed the cigar over his shoulder. The glowing butt fell quite near me

where I crouched on my heels in the rhododendron bush.

"Well, Jerry!" said Byrnes, cheerfully. "How about it?"

Jerry—that was Bunthorne, apparently—made no reply. His head sank lower, if anything.

"Buck up, old mouldy-moods," said Byrnes, slapping him on the back. "You'd think hope had chucked the eternal act the way you mope. Don't be a bally owl. How's the fam'ly?"

"Shylock Smith"—Bunthorne's utterance was a groan—"I never thought you'd do a thing like this. I know we're a bad lot—so they say, anyway; but I did think there was still some honour among—thieves, if you like."

"I'm not saying there ain't, Jerry," said Byrnes, evidently willing, as master of the situation, to bandy a few words if it would comfort anybody. "But then, you see, you ain't exactly one of the forty thieves any more. You've gone back on the bunch, so to speak. You're a sort of *proaty-jay* of the law." He qualified the august institution with two frightful adjectives. "There isn't a man as ever jibed at a blue uniform as wouldn't be tickled half to death if they knew. They'd say unanimous, 'Soak him, Shylock. Soak him for all he's worth!'"

I leaned forward, loth to miss a word. As they say in the children's game, I was getting "warm." Apparently Bunthorne—or Jerry, as Byrnes, *alias* "Shylock," called him—was a backslider of some sort—an ex-criminal who had turned "stool-pigeon,"

perhaps, and earned the undying hatred of his former fellow outlaws.

Bunthorne was speaking again.

"I know. I know how it looks to you and them, Shylock." His tone carried the weariness of a man who has used the same old argument until its edge is worn and he feels its dullness himself. "But you don't stop to think, Shylock Smith. What difference does it make? If they hadn't got me, they'd have got someone else. There's dozens would ha' grabbed at the chance. I didn't. I hated it.

"But think what it meant to me, Shylock. I wasn't a bad man at heart. I never stole or cheated a man in my life. It was I who was cheated—cheated out o' life, cheated of everything that was worth while to a simple fellow that wanted nothing but to work for his four walls and his own roof and his wife and baby.

"I killed a man—yes, I killed a man. But I'd do it again. That don't matter here or now, though. But can't you see it, Shylock? My little one in an orphan asylum and me rotting in a cell for killing the man that as good as put her there. She was all I had. She's all I have. It meant freedom, though God knows I've often wished that she was dead and me back where I wouldn't have to talk to a human soul. But I took their terms, and by and by they let me out. Now, why don't you let me alone, Shylock? *Why* don't you let me alone?"

"Jerry," said Byrnes, *alias* "Shylock" Smith, "that's a pretty pow'rful piece of mouth-work you got off there. You'd make a fortune in Princess

melodrama. Only, it ain't what you'd call 'pertinent'. Likewise it's a chestnut. Why, you said the same blame thing word for word when I butted in on your readin' lib'r'y where you've got all the comforts that you bought with the price o' many a man's sweat.

"The point is, old beefsteak, all that verbal noise has got no more to do with the case than the flowers that bloom in the spring, to say nothing of the tra-la. You never heard, did you, of the wise guy who stuck his thumb in his waistcoat and says, 'Gents, we are confronted by a condition, not a theory.' Gee-whiz! I always admired that man's language—like putting a dynamite stick under a farthing balloon—what?

"Nothing doing, Jerry," he went on, banter becoming sarcasm. "But, say! If it'll help you any, I'm sorry, Jerry, that sorry I woke up this morning and wept about you. But business is business, as prob'ly you savvied yourself when you made that little deal with the governor of the prison, and I've got you where your hair's short, old cockeye.

"Did you bring the money?" he concluded, sharply.

"Yes," said Bunthorne, "I brought it, but——"

"Well, pass it over, my honey-bee. I hate to appear grasping, but they used to call me 'Shylock' Smith. Maybe I am, but when a man's got the only chew o' 'baccy in the whole tier, can't he name his own terms—even if it's the only file in the whole house? Business is business, my buck. Let's see the yellow johnnies."

"You'll get them," said Jess's father, irritably.

"You know you will. But you'll wait till I'm about ready to give them to you."

There was fight in Bunthorne's voice, even if it was touched with the hopelessness of a losing fight.

"Oh, that's the tune," sneered Byrnes. "Did you ever step on the end of a worm, Jerry, and see it dab at your boot with the other end? But, honest now, old slackjaws, this may be truly rural, and I do say the stars are mighty pretty up there, but mother says I'm never to sit out too long in the park with a strange gentleman. S'elp me, Jerry, 'tain't *proper*!"

"Smith," said Bunthorne, hoarsely, "you are utterly vile. I will pay you and be rid of you. But mark me, you cold-blooded thief, if you come near me again, I will turn you over to the police, who would be very pleased to lay hands on such a pretty scoundrel."

Byrnes burst out laughing.

"Go it, Jerry! Go it! Come in on the home stretch."

"Even now," said Bunthorne, his voice choked with wrath, "if I raised my voice it would be the end of you and this. You know I have neither reason nor right to yield to your blackguardly demands. I am an honest man. You know it! I was a fool to give you money yesterday. I *refuse* to give you money now. Shylock Smith—make yourself scarce before I call the police!"

Byrnes never moved from his languid position on the bench.

"Jerry," said he, with maddening deliberateness,

"I'm *sur-prised* at you. You hurt my *ammer pro-pray*. You don't mean what you say. You know perfectly well it would completely spoil my little game and land me in the cooler. But I know you've got a good heart. I know you ain't going to do no such thing as call any blame bobby."

"I will! As heaven sees me, I will!"

"Well, heaven's staring at you! *Why don't you?*" said Byrnes, ferociously.

Bunthorne's head fell and his uplifted, clenched fist dropped to his side. Joe Byrnes chuckled.

"You ain't got a smoke about you, Jerry, have you?" he asked in the friendliest manner. "I chucked mine away—only half-smoked, too."

"For the sake of plain human mercy, Smith, listen to me," said Bunthorne, and he was again the beaten dog at heel. "I gave you money yesterday. I'll give you money now. But if I do, say this is the end of it. You'll leave me alone if I give it to you? You won't come back next week and——"

"Well," Byrnes interrupted, "it depends on how long it lasts, Jerry. The less you hand out at a time, the oftener I'll have to fall back on my generous benefactor."

"Listen, Shylock. It isn't for myself I'm asking. If it was, I—I wouldn't have to—I wouldn't care. But it's for Jess. It's for my little daughter. It's her I'm fighting for. It's——"

"Oh, *damn* your daughter!"

Then it happened.

A smothered shriek, like the half-articulate cry of a wild animal, burst from Bunthorne's throat. The

whole bulk of the man seemed suddenly launched with spread claws upon the man on the bench.

Byrnes was half risen to his feet when the human avalanche descended upon him. He was borne back over the bench and Bunthorne's fingers were at his throat.

Behind the rhododendron bush all command of action seemed to have deserted me. I had been crouching there watching a play which had enthralled my interest until now, at the climax of the scene, I was as one unable to separate the real from the illusion.

I heard and saw the scuffle. It did not occupy five seconds. There was only a flash of action and a queer gurgling sound that came—I think—from Byrnes. Then it was all over.

The Devil's Island man lay limply upon his back over the bench, his feet on the cement walk, his fallen head almost touching the lawn grass behind.

And everything was still—horribly still!

Bunthorne stood in the middle of the path, breathing heavily and wiping his eyes repeatedly with the back of his hand.

At that moment I recovered my faculties and arose to my feet. My head brushed the rhododendron branches.

At the sound Bunthorne also seemed to remember where he was and how situated. He uttered a half-gasp, half-groan, and suddenly took to his heels, running along the cement walk toward the park gate. I stepped out of the rhododendron and followed him with my eyes. He suddenly left the path and I

saw him cower in the shadow of a piece of shrubbery.

At the same time swiftly running footsteps sounded on the hard cement, and a light appeared coming rapidly toward me. A broad figure, seemingly giant-like under a tall helmet, loomed up behind the light.

It was a policeman. Apparently he had heard Bunthorne's furious scream. The rest he could hardly have heard. He flashed the bull's-eye in my face and I was surprised to hear him say, with a strong Gaelic accent:

"Ah, is it you, my friend? I haff seen you pefore. What haff we here?"

He flashed his light around, upon the walk, upon the lawn, upon the rhododendron bush. The ray finally settled like a comet's tail upon the limp figure drooping across the bench.

"You will stand there and not move," said the Highland policeman, suddenly blinding me with the full glare of the bull's-eye, a weapon of arrest more effective than any strong arm.

Next instant he put his right hand to his lips and the penetrating double note of a metropolitan police whistle jarred the stillness of the night with its disconcerting drone.

CHAPTER XI

THUMBS UP

I SPENT that night in jail. It was not long before the whole purpose of the grim god of mischance, the whole design of his weaving, became apparent. I was hopelessly a victim of circumstances, every thread of which culminated in a masterly device around me.

I do not know what they did with Joe Byrnes, *alias* "Shylock" Smith. I only know that the "Black Maria" came to the park and that a police surgeon pronounced the man dead. Then the body was taken away—to the police office, perhaps, or to the mortuary.

Me they detained as a material witness and took to the police office. Here I was plied with questions as to my name, antecedents, business, etc. At that, the gravity of my position and the peril of disgrace that threatened my father and mother, as well as myself, dawned upon me.

For the present, Jess was safe if, as I suspected was the case, her father had escaped from the park without any but myself knowing that he had ever been there. As far as Bunthorne was concerned, I could easily temporize pending deeper consideration of the situation or developments that might occur outside of

my control. As far as my own identity and that of my people went, I could, and instantly decided to, adopt Mr. Kipling's advice. I would lie, if necessary, while my lips could utter and a man was alive to hear.

Therefore, I proceeded by continuing the lie I had lived, which was one way of telling the present truth. My name was John Sheffield. I was twenty-six years old. I was born in Scotland. My height was precisely six feet. I believed my eyes were gray, my hair brown, and my beard of a reddish brown. I was a seafaring man and had lived at the Crown Tavern since my discharge from a ship about a week before. What ship and where discharged? That was the first of many questions that I refused to answer. I remembered the formal warning that anything I said might be used against me. I would give no information that might lead backward to my identity even if the clue trailed half way around the world.

I was asked if I had killed Byrnes. I said no. Had I seen the murder committed? I had? Did I know who killed Byrnes? That question I declined to answer.

Presently I was taken into a private room and submitted to closer examination. One after another, keen-faced police officials arrived, and each took a turn at questioning me. It was hard work fending them off. Presently I refused to answer any further questions under any circumstances. Being ignorant of my legal rights, I determined to take refuge in the right to silence. They persisted half the night, then locked me in a cell and left me to my own reflections.

I soon fell asleep from sheer mental exhaustion. My last thought that night was bitter. Why had I not held to the wise decision formed before meeting Jess? Had I refused to become further involved in the affairs of the Bunthornes and said good-bye to Jess as I had planned, I should not now be in a cell. But I had turned a deaf ear to the sage whisper of common sense; listened, rather, to the urgings of love. I had elected myself champion-knight of Jess and her father. I had returned to the park and had been sole witness of a murder. And now I was in jail.

What a fool I had been! What a fool I was!

In the morning the police again tried to extract details. I adhered to all and only what I had already stated. Beyond this, I made it clear that I should say nothing, at least for the present; nothing about the identity of the person who had committed the crime, whether I knew him or would know him again; whether I had any friends or relations with whom I wished to communicate. I refused point blank to say anything about my antecedents, the exact place of my birth, or my movements on the night of the tragedy and prior to my arrival at the Crown Tavern.

"You know that this man also lived at the Crown?" said my inquisitor.

"He may have done so."

"You and he quarrelled in the bar there yesterday afternoon?"

The police had been busy. But still I temporized.

"You realize what this may mean for you if you don't clear yourself?"

"I begin to."

"And you still persist in keeping your mouth shut?"

"For the present—yes."

Perhaps the inquisitor saw that I meant it. He presently desisted. Later, I was placed in the Black Maria and taken to some court. I do not know where it was, or its exact nature. I was as one temporarily cut off from all information. I was in the toils of the law.

The hearing lasted some time. I was told by the presiding officer that I was under no obligation to answer any question put to me at this time, but that it would be the worse for me if I did not. I answered certain questions and others I did not. There was some astonishment when I said that I had witnessed the commission of the crime but refused to state whether I knew the murderer.

The police surgeon was called. He said that he believed the dead man had been strangled. There were finger-marks on the throat. There were certain indications of a dislocation of the vertebræ and the surgeon believed the autopsy would reveal a condition of the lungs indicating suffocation.

The Highland policeman who had arrested me (Constable McNab) said, when questioned, that he had seen me earlier in the evening at the park gate, where I met a young woman who had apparently been anxious to hide her identity. She wore a heavy veil. He did not know what had become of this young woman. He had not seen her leave the park and she was not in my company when I was arrested

beside the body of the deceased. Constable McNab told how he had heard a cry in the park and described minutely the condition of affairs as he found them when he arrived at the scene of the crime.

The office clerk of the Crown Tavern told how the deceased, known at the tavern as Mr. Jonson, had gone out to "do the town" with Mr. Sheffield on the night before the murder. Mr. Sheffield, who had registered at the hotel twenty-four hours before Jonson, had inquired for his friend on the afternoon before the affair in the park and had been directed to the bar. The clerk did not know if Byrnes and I had been acquainted before the evening we went out to "do the town."

"The two gents were very much the worse for wear," he said, "when they returned in the early hours of the morning."

The next witness was a woman. I recognized her as the hard-faced barmaid with the set smile. Yes, the police had been quite industrious.

Smirking and rolling her eyes after the manner of her kind, she told of the first meeting in the bar. "The murdered party" and I were apparently old acquaintances, she said, and glad to meet one another again, although, she admitted, "this gentleman" (meaning me) did not seem as glad as "the other gentleman."

We were both sailors, she judged from some photographs which Mr. Jonson had shown her. The photographs were produced. She identified them and the two persons pictured in them—Mr. Jonson and myself. She also identified me as the person

felling the mate in the Coffin Island snapshot and told how Mr. Jonson had said I was "pretty nifty with the mitts."

The most important testimony she gave was that last time she had seen Jonson and me together, we had quarrelled, and I had struck Mr. Jonson. More closely questioned on this point she gave it as her opinion that the quarrel was about a woman. She had heard Mr. Jonson say, just before the blow was struck:

"If it's the woman you want, you can have her as a gift."

She also said that Mr. Jonson had plenty of money and that he paid for the drinks out of a handful of gold coin.

The last witness called before adjournment for luncheon was the same keen-faced official who had been chief inquisitor at the police office. I heard him identify himself as Matthew Quinlan, a detective.

Detective Quinlan startled me at the outset by identifying the deceased, H. Jonson, as one Henry Smith, *alias* "Shylock" Smith, *alias* Joe Byrnes, a well-known criminal, who was believed to have recently returned from America.

Quinlan said that Smith was a notorious felon who had served several sentences in Great Britain, enumerating them and the time "done" in each case. According to the detective, Smith finally went to America and was reported in New York City. Later he went to France. In Paris he was arrested for complicity in the robbery of a French bank and sent

to Devil's Island, the French penal settlement off Guienne.

According to comparatively recent advices, he had escaped from Devil's Island in company with a man known as Jim Lefferts, also notorious. Lefferts was said to have died in the jungles of Guienne. Smith, *alias* Byrnes, was later in San Francisco, from which he fled in company with a man named John Price, who might possibly be the said Lefferts, who was said to have died. The description of this man Price had not been obtained but would be shortly. The two men, Smith and Price, were believed to have shipped in a vessel, the *Seabreeze*, bound for southern whaling waters.

After that, the police detective said, there was no record of either of the men until Smith turned up in New York. He left New York in a hurry, being wanted by the New York police for the robbery of a diamond merchant's store. He had escaped to St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, whence he had sailed on a liner for Glasgow.

The detective said he had viewed the body of the man found in the park and had positively identified it as that of Smith, *alias* Byrnes.

Detective Quinlan was asked if he had ever seen me before, or knew anything about me. He said he did not know me, but from the photographs and other circumstances, he believed that I was this John Price mentioned by the San Francisco police. I might even be the American criminal, Lefferts. He explained that the report of a criminal's death was not always accepted by the police as fact.

He differed with the woman witness as to the cause of the quarrel in the bar. He believed that it was over money. He pointed out that when I, the material witness, was searched at the police office, the sum of nineteen pounds had been found on my person, mostly in gold. On the person of the dead man six sovereigns and some loose silver had been found. He could account for the robbery being not wholly accomplished by the fact that Constable McNab had allowed no time to elapse between hearing the cry in the park and arriving at the scene of the murder. The robber might not have had time to possess himself of all the money.

After this, I was taken back to my cell; but later in the day I was again brought to the hearing. It appeared that, in the interval, an autopsy had been performed. Before the hearing was resumed there was considerable whispering between the police officials, the presiding officer, and a tall man with an intellectual head and a vandyke beard—a newcomer in court. As they whispered, many glances were cast in my direction.

I was again called as a witness and, as at the earlier hearing, warned that I was under no obligation to answer questions and that anything I did say might later be used against me. It was not necessary to inform me that I was under suspicion of the worst kind.

“But you have heard the testimony here to-day,” said the presiding officer. “It seems to me useless for you to deny that you knew the deceased in other days, that, as an established fact, you had been to

sea with him at some time and for some period more or less."

"I do not deny it," I said.

"May I ask if you were in San Francisco with him?"

I paused before replying. My object for the present, at least, was to shield my parents, to prevent the connection of John Sheffield with the son of my father. John Price was the connecting link between San Francisco and Trinidad. If they could trace John Price between 'Frisco and the West Indies, the rest would be easy and my father would awake to find his son in the toils of the law in the city where his name was held in high honour.

"I have been in San Francisco among many other places," I said.

"Have you ever, by any chance, been in India?" the presiding officer mildly inquired.

"No."

"Or Algeria?"

"No."

"Or Japan?"

"Yes. I have been in Japan," I admitted, willing to answer where it seemed safe to do so, for every question to which I refused reply brought more suspicion upon me.

"Thank you," said the presiding officer, almost with a triumphant note.

As he said it, he glanced at the tall man with the professional appearance. That gentleman nodded gravely, as if satisfied upon some point. He was presently called to the stand and asked what the autopsy had revealed.

Contrary to the police surgeon's anticipations, the new witness, Doctor Trevor his name was, said that the autopsy had discovered no signs of strangulation. The lung cells were intact.

"Death was due to a dislocation of the first and second vertebræ," said Doctor Trevor. "There was single contusion on each side of the neck, about one inch and a half below each ear. The dislocation was caused by an adroit pressure of the murderer's thumbs. Death was instantaneous. I may add that it is the first case of its kind I have ever seen."

This statement produced a sensation.

"You mean," said the presiding officer, himself taken aback, "that this man—the deceased—was killed—instantaneously killed—by the mere pressure of another man's thumbs?"

"That is what I mean," said the surgeon. "That is what happened, to the best of my knowledge and belief."

"You say that it is the first case of its kind you have ever seen. Have you ever *heard* of a similar case?"

"Only indirectly. Not in this country, however," was the reply. The witness seemed about to add something voluntarily, but the presiding officer quickly raised a warning hand.

"That will do for the present, Doctor Trevor," said he. "I think we have heard enough."

When the hearing was over I was taken again to a cell, but this time in another prison; and this time I was charged with the murder of Henry, *alias* "Shylock," Smith, *alias* Joseph Aloysius Byrnes.

CHAPTER XII

I SET MY COURSE

SO INTENT had I been upon two things—not to betray my identity for my parents' sake, and for Jess's not to betray her father—that I overlooked where my course was taking my own ship.

I partially realized it that night as I lay on a cot in a dark cell and pondered the situation. My father's son, who had been on the social toboggan for the last five years, had at last reached the bottom of the drop. I was in prison, charged with murder!

Of course, it was consoling to feel and know that I was innocent. A clear conscience is half the battle against odds; but in this case my conscience was not quite clear of intimate knowledge of the murder, the murderer, and the motives for the crime. And the odds against me, personally, were great—more than sufficient to send me to the gallows.

I had brought everything upon myself. There was the irony of it. I had only to say a word or two and Daniel Bunthorne would be arrested promptly and tried and hanged (mainly upon my evidence). I would be set free without a stain upon my character, and Jess. . . .

There was where the line of least resistance struck

an obstacle. I could hardly resume a warm relationship with Jess after I had virtually hanged her father. I could hardly expect her to smile a welcome when she met me again. I would have been, rightly or wrongly, the Nemesis of her father, the destroyer of the Bunthorne home and her peace, putting aside her happiness as a thing that never had been quite possible of achievement.

Without going any deeper into the proposition, here was enough to stay my tongue from too readily meeting questions with answers that would hopelessly involve others. True enough, in keeping others out of it, I entangled myself the more. But what I needed, what Bunthorne needed, what I was aiming for, was time—time to think over my own situation, time to let Bunthorne think over his, so that each of us might consider best how Jess might be spared sorrow one way or the other.

Also, it was for Bunthorne to act; not me. I was his scapegoat *pro tem*. For many reasons I was not unwilling to remain a temporary victim, a sop to Cerberus, if any good end was to be attained. These reasons I formed and tabled as I lay thinking in my cell:

1. The law would not hang an innocent man.
2. Something would develop to establish *my* innocence, at least.
3. Bunthorne would hardly let another man go to the gibbet for a crime that he, himself, had committed.
4. I did not believe that the police could identify me as my father's son.

5. For the sake of my father and mother, I must remain John Sheffield and refuse to assist in establishing my real identity.

6. Daniel Bunthorne had killed Byrnes to protect Jess, as I believed. I also believed him more than half justified. I could not bring myself to betray him, therefore, and bring greater sorrow upon Jess.

7. I loved Jess, and naturally would suffer in her stead. She would think my disappearance due to a return to my earlier decision, not to engage myself further in matters of a doubtful complexion.

8. I revered my mother and was proud of my father. I was willing to endure wrong under a false identity rather than bring disgrace upon them.

9. I was young, quixotic and, possibly, very much of a fool.

There were a number of things that still troubled me, however, even after I had settled upon the attitude which I would adopt, or, rather continue. These I also formed and tabled:

1. The law had every reason to believe me guilty, and would assuredly hang me, supposing—

2. I continued to keep silence and Bunthorne did not come to the rescue. Even if I told the truth and Bunthorne chose to deny the charge, what evidence was there against him, while there was enough to hang me twice over?

3. Bunthorne did not know I had been an eyewitness of his crime. Perhaps he did not know it was I who had been arrested. Perhaps, as he had already killed two men for Jess's sake and to preserve

his precious secret, he would not stop at letting a third man go to the gallows for the self-same reasons.

4. If the police of Glasgow or San Francisco found that tramp steamer, John Price would be traced back to Trinidad and Glasgow, where-upon—

5. My effort to hide my identity for my parents' sake would be vain.

6. Going to the gallows was a tall price to pay in sympathy for Bunthorne and his extenuating circumstances.

7. Was my love for Jess so great that I would stake my life, *unknown to her*, sooner than betray her father and bring shame upon her?

8. Was I really serving my parents in risking the gallows to save them from a notoriety which they might willingly accept as an alternative to losing an only son?

9. No doubt I *was* a fool.

Again it seemed to be a choice between Jess and my parents. If I betrayed Bunthorne, it was the end of the man and the ruining of Jess's life. If I betrayed Bunthorne, save for temporary notoriety, it would mean the clearing of my name and my restoration to my father and mother.

I tried to conclude what Jess would do if she discovered the facts of the situation and found that she must choose between sending her father to the gallows or letting me go in his stead. Her situation would be no less difficult than mine. Personally, I would rather choose for myself than for others.

Bunthorne did not allow her to read the news-

papers, but I was sure that now, if never before, he would read them himself. Perhaps Jess would, too, for she was now in rebellion against her father's rules of home government. If she did, and read even a reference to the park tragedy, she could not fail to know that Byrnes had been done away with and that someone had been arrested for the murder. Her father's return from the meeting place where Byrnes's body had been found, and my own disappearance that same evening, would be enough to arouse her suspicions, even if she did not see my pictures (photo by Byrnes) in the newspapers, as "Jack the Thumb-Killer," or read in plain English that John Sheffield was the accused.

She would challenge her father with what she knew of the doings of that evening and the rest that she suspected. Perhaps he would throw himself upon her mercy, confessing all. Perhaps he would not. In any case, if she got an inkling of a single fact in the case, her intuition would tell her the whole truth in a flash.

What would she do? Demand that her father save me by confessing himself as the author of the crime and himself going to the gallows? Or let me, whom she professed to love, die that her father might be saved?

I thought long upon her probable action. Naturally, if he confessed to her, he would also tell her why he had killed Byrnes. He would tell her his secret, which was part of his excuse. I finally decided, from what I knew of Jess, that she would stand loyal to the father whose very crimes grew out of his paternal devotion for her. She was the kind of daughter

who would stand by him even though his soul might be black with guilt and her own heart be broken.

But what alternatives for a girl to choose from! I found myself praying that she might never know the facts, fervently hoping that her father would keep the newspapers from her sight. I was willing that she should think of my love as a weak, unworthy thing and that I, considerate of my own good name, had merely retired from her and her father's affairs in disgust. Rather this than that Jess—poor, innocent Jess—should be called upon to choose which should die—her father or her lover!

As for my own father and mother: They would read the newspapers. They would shudder over the details of the park murder, so near to their own town house. They would gaze with horror upon the picture of that inhuman monster who killed men instantaneously with his bare thumbs. Never in the wildest flight of fancy would they connect this bearded, seafaring ruffian with the immaculate youth of other days. A mother's instinct would revolt against such a connection, even if a mother's eye might wistfully linger upon that pictured brow and find a discomfoting something in those pictured eyes.

That settled it. Bunthorne or no Bunthorne, Jess or no Jess, I would drink this cup in silence sooner than let it come to the lips of my mother, or bow my father's head to its disgraceful bitterness.

Jess was right. My duty, like hers, was primarily toward the authors of my being. Yet the Other Person in me cackled:

"Then why not speak the truth and clear your

father's good name that you bear? You are lying to yourself. It is the woman you would save; therefore her father, for in betraying him you would ruin her. Think again!"

Then I knew that the Other Person spoke the truth. It *was* Jess whom I would save. I was merely supporting that determination by arguing that my father and mother would never know, and thus be spared sorrow. I laughed bitterly in the darkness as I paraphrased an old saying which seems to have much truth in it: A daughter is always a daughter through thick and thin, but a son remains a son only until he finds the one woman, and for her he abandons every other obligation.

So I adhered to my first policy and determined to continue it. For Jess's sake I would not utter a word in my own defence that would help to establish the truth, even if the shadow of the gallows came to my very feet. But, of course, Bunthorne could not humanly allow matters to come to that pass if, as I firmly believed, he was an honest man, despite his two murders and his mysterious secret.

As for me, personally, I had made a mess of my life. I had descended the ladder instead of climbing it. I had come back to Scotland the companion of thieves, murderers, convicts. This was the result. I had made my bed. I might do worse than graciously lie down on it. By so doing I might possibly establish that there was, after all, some good in me. I might redeem myself (in my own respect, at least) by rising for once to a test of unselfish judgment and personal sacrifice upon what I believed to be a principle.

And again my father and mother? They were not mine. I was not their son. I was unrecognizable even to my better self, in the sailor accused of murdering his mate with his bare thumbs and in a sordid quarrel over money or some unknown woman (probably of the street). What had my parents to do with such a person? What had *their* son to do with him?

That son was abroad—somewhere. They did not know whether he was alive or dead. He had not written since his disappearance from Trinidad. He was as good as dead to them. At least, the wound of the lost son was in their hearts. It would always ache more or less. The certainty that he was no more on earth would creep in slowly, mercifully. Better this than for them to awake to the knowledge that that son lay in prison at the very doors of home and awaiting trial for life. If I called to them, making myself known, they would be forced to believe me guilty, for I saw it clearly now: I would not, even if I could, betray Bunthorne, because of Jess—because I loved Jess—and because he who loved her, too, had killed Byrnes for Jess's sake.

So I settled the matter and let it rest—for the time being, at least. I would do nothing—I *could* do nothing—but wait!

It would be weeks before my trial, months before the result of that trial could see execution. There was plenty of time in which to change my tune if I changed my mind.

In the meantime, it was Bunthorne's first move. What would he do?

CHAPTER XIII

A QUESTION OF SANITY

DAYS passed. They were days of mental activity, nights of mental exhaustion. I knew nothing of what was going on in the world, particularly what concerning me. My world was within three walls and a barred door.

There was another hearing before a different presiding officer and in another court. It was held soon after the first, which was in the nature of an inquest, I fancy.

This time I was charged with murder and asked if I waived examination. I was advised to do so by the judge, who inquired to know if I had retained counsel. I explained that I had no means wherewith to pay counsel for defending a trial for life. Thereupon the bench appointed an advocate to confer with me. I was then remanded to jail.

Later in the day I was taken from my cell to a private room in the prison. I was left alone with the advocate, who introduced himself as a Mr. Murray. He could not have been more than thirty and did not hide his pleasure at the opportunity afforded him in his professional career.

"I don't mind telling you," said he in the friendliest manner possible, "that this is the first big chance I've had to show what stuff I'm made of. Naturally

I'm going to fight hard for your life, my friend, just as if it was my own—which it is, in a sense."

"Sorry you haven't a better case," said I.

"Tut, tut!" said he. "You mustn't talk like that. You are, of course, not guilty. So you will plead. Now, the best thing you can do is, tell me all about it. Understand that what you may say to me is without prejudice—that is, as if under the seal of the confessional.

"If you are guilty, tell me so and I will try to find some extenuation that will save you from at least the extreme penalty. If you are not guilty it will be my business to show it to the jury and get you acquitted. Only—you must tell me *everything*!

"Now, then!" said he, briskly, picking up a pen and preparing to make notes on a big paper pad. "Tell me your story—the whole story of your life up to the time of the—er—alleged offence. We will deal with that afterward. Where were you born? Who were your parents? How were you brought up? Where and how educated? Profession, etc., etc.?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Murray," I said, and truly I was—for him. "I can answer none of these questions. I am Jack Sheffield. I never existed before I registered at the Crown Tavern."

"Come!" said the advocate, throwing down his pen. "This will never do. You don't seem to realize your position, my friend. You are fighting for your life, and it is not going to be the easiest matter to save you even at the best of it. You've simply got to confide in me. You're a drowning man. This is your straw."

"I will confide in no one."

Mr. Murray stared at me, then thoughtfully—and with an air of patience—took up his pen.

"You saw the murder committed?" he asserted.

"I did."

"How did you come to be there?"

"I can't answer that."

"Won't, you mean. Very well. You saw the man who committed the murder?"

"Yes."

"Who was he?" There was silence. "You didn't commit the murder yourself, of course?"

"No."

"You know the murderer. What is his name?"

"Can't answer that."

Again the young advocate threw the pen on the table. He arose to his feet and walked up and down the room, literally tearing his hair.

"Good heavens, man!" he cried. "Are you mad? Are you trying to commit suicide at the crown's expense? Don't you realize that this case is of little or no importance to any one whatever, that to the court it will appear nothing but a simple, sordid sailor row over some street trollop? Do you realize that, unless I can in some way raise this case out of the ordinary, the judge and jury will fall asleep over it and just wake up to return a verdict of guilty and sentence you to be hanged, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul, amen, and go home to dinner? Come out of it, man! If you keep this up you're as good as hanged!"

For an hour he sat at that table, or paced up and

down the room, perspiration rolling down his face, hurling unanswerable, unanswered questions at me and only pausing at intervals to plead with me, at first for my sake, then, in desperation, for his own.

I suspected all along that Mr. Murray, himself, believed it was a plain case of two drunken sailors fighting over a woman, that he cared not a farthing whether I hanged or not, except as it might affect his reputation. What he wanted was *a case*—a case upon which he could mount in the public eye by advertising himself in the public press. He was painfully and pardonably human, of course, but he and his little affairs did not greatly appeal to me just then.

Who was the woman—the woman I had met at the park gate? Where did I get the gold if not out of “Shylock” Smith’s pocket? What was the quarrel about in the Crown bar? What was the story of that pugilistic photograph which showed me to be a violent man of my hands?

These and dozens of other questions he had hurled at me. I gave no answer to most of them.

“Of course you don’t know how to kill a man with your bare thumbs?”

“I never heard of such a thing until Doctor Trevor spoke of it at the inquest.”

“Yet there’s the very point that’s going to put the rope around your neck. You admitted that you had been in Japan. Were you?”

“Yes. And I admitted it. But what’s that got to do with the case?”

“What’s it got to do with the case?” echoed Mr. Murray, quite aghast at my coolness, or what he sup-

posed was an assumption of innocence. "Why, Lord help you! Doctor Trevor says that the Japanese have some science called joo-ji-something-or-other——"

"*Jiu-jitsu?*" I assisted. This was before the Russo-Japanese war. At that time the British had as little knowledge of things Japanese as the rest of the occident.

"There you go again—stretching your own neck with the wrong sort of volunteered information!" wailed the advocate. "What do you know about this joo-jootsi business?"

"Well, I know a little about it—the simple movements, at least. I learned them in Japan."

"Oh—my—stars!" groaned the unhappy Mr. Murray. "And I hear Trevor says that same thing was employed to kill Smith, unless——"

"Look here, man. Do you know anything about anatomy? You don't? Good! Did you ever study medicine or surgery, or anything like that?"

"Never."

"Then—then look here! It must have been an accident that your thumbs landed on a fatal spot—eh? That's it—an accident! Now we're getting to something."

"It most assuredly would have been an accident—only I didn't kill the man. You forget that. I was ten paces from him when he was done for."

"Did the man that you say killed Smith have any knowledge of this Japanese trick?"

"I don't think so."

"Was he a surgeon, or a doctor, or a medical student, or anything like that?"

"I don't think so."

"Perhaps, then, it was an accident in *his* case."

"I think it was. I don't imagine he thought of actually killing the man."

"Then why worry about him?" pleaded Mr. Murray. "Why protect him? If it was an accident we could get him off lightly, especially with your testimony to help him. On the other hand, if you persist in shouldering the crime, you haven't got a particle of evidence to save, let alone clear, you!"

"Mr. Murray," I repeated, with much regret, "you deserve a better case."

"I deserve a less mule-headed client!" he snapped.

"You refuse to reveal the murderer's name?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"I did not say I knew him."

"Bah! You refuse to help me in any particular. You refuse to reveal your own identity, the cause of the quarrel in the bar, the name of the woman involved, what you were doing at the scene of the crime where you got the nineteen sovereigns you had. You refuse to tell me anything, except that you know something of some infernal oriental science that kills a man with the bare thumbs, as this fellow Smith was done for. Do I conceive your attitude correctly, Mr. Sheffield?"

"That about covers it, Mr. Murray," I said.

"Very well!" said he. "I have half a mind to throw up the case, but I can't do it now. Only, you may take my word for it. You'll swing as high as

Haman within two months! I leave you to think that over. Good afternoon!"

He left in high dudgeon and a warder took me back to my cell.

Next day the advocate returned. Again and again, day after day, he renewed the attack. But he learned nothing.

Then one day I received a visit from several professional appearing persons. Among them was the surgeon, Doctor Trevor, who had presided at the autopsy. Doctor Trevor kept silent at first, while the others, before whom I was brought in the private room, plied me with all sorts of questions on subjects that seemed to have no relevance to anything or to each other.

"My dear sir," said one of them very gravely, "if a herring and a half costs three ha'pence, how many could you purchase for the sum of eleven pence?"

"That," I replied, just as gravely, "is a question which I do not care to answer in the absence of counsel."

There was silence. Then the person who had asked the question chuckled softly.

The degree of idiocy in the questions varied. Presently they became more subtle.

"Does it not seem to you, Sheffield," said another, "that in this case you are being martyred, that you are being persecuted rather than prosecuted?"

"I haven't thought of it in that way," I replied. "If I have considered myself at all, it is to conclude that I may be acting like a damned fool."

At that a gray-haired old man with a kindly eye spoke up.

"I will put a blunt question to you, Sheffield," said he, abruptly. His name was Doctor Helmar, I found out. "Are you insane?"

"No. What suggested that idea?"

"Never mind. I don't think you are, myself," said Doctor Helmar. "I may say, however, that to determine your mental condition is the object of this visit of myself and colleagues."

"Well," said I, "my sanity may break before I am done with this, but so far, I can assure you, I have noticed nothing peculiar about myself."

"Others have, however," said the grave colleague who had made me the herring riddle. "Your attitude in this murder case has excited—er—grave suspicions as to your mental responsibility."

"I am scarcely surprised. But may I assume that you gentlemen are neither for nor against me?"

"That is a correct assumption."

"Then, to be frank, I believe I am perfectly responsible. I know by whom this murder was committed and how it came about. The murderer has my sympathy. I, personally, find myself in a difficult position as regards him. That is all. I do not feel that I would be justified in betraying him—at least, not until it appears that my own death is the alternative."

The professional gentlemen, especially Doctor Helmar, seemed much interested.

"I see, I see," said Doctor Helmar. "Very commendable—very—even if you only *feel* that you are justified in keeping silent. I do not think you are mad, whatever else I may think of you. Neither

are you of the type that I expected to find. You have had some—er—slight education?”

“Varsity man,” said I. I could not resist it.

“Indeed? Your *alma mater*?”

“I would rather not say. It might tend to my identity.”

“That is true—very true,” said Doctor Helmar.

“I had not meant to—er—intrude.”

He looked around at his colleagues as if to inquire if they were satisfied. It was then that the surgeon, Doctor Trevor, spoke.

“Sheffield,” said he, without preliminary, “do you know anything about the odontoid process?”

“Never heard of it,” said I.

“Do you know what happens to a man when he is hanged?”

“*Ttt, ttt, ttt!*” protested Doctor Helmar, rising to his feet. Doctor Trevor laughed in an embarrassed way.

“I beg your pardon,” said he to me. “I did not mean what Doctor Helmar or you have thought I did. I was referring merely to a scientific fact. However, it is possible I have no right to question you on that point. Mmm. . . . Good day—er—Sheffield.”

The professional men took their departure. I distinctly heard Trevor say to a colleague:

“Perfectly sane—perfectly. Possibly saner than you or I, Hastings.”

Doctor Helmar lingered and actually held out his hand to me.

“Good-bye, young man,” said he, kindly. “I wish you luck.” His voice dropped almost to a whisper.

He held my hand firmly and looked straight into my eyes.

"You're innocent, of course," said he. "I see that. But think well, my boy. By the by—*is she worth it?*"

"She is!" said I, inspired to confidence by his manner.

"Then God bless you, you idiot!" said he. "Stick to what you think is right, although," with a dubious shake of his head, "you're probably all wrong."

With the exception of the now almost frantic young advocate, I had no other visitors in prison before the day set for my trial.

When that day came the situation was unchanged, so far as I knew, until I sat in the prisoner's dock in court. Then I was quickly made to realize that it had grown infinitely worse for me.

And still there was no sign or word from Daniel Bunthorne, in whose shoes I stood facing judgment!

CHAPTER XIV

THE SCALES OF JUSTICE

THE court was filled with the usual curious crowd, morbidly eager to see a man pass through that ordeal upon which depends his life or death. The twelve good men and true seemed to be a fairly representative dozen. The judge on the bench was a severe elderly person with an under-jaw that, in the action of speech, moved like a fish's mouth taking water.

Counsel did not present much of an array. There were two apprentices supporting two advocates. One was my unhappy defender and he was talking eagerly—protesting, asserting, deprecating, appealing with tongue, hands, shoulders, and eyebrows—to a calm person with a smile that was of sympathy touched with personal satisfaction. He was crown counsel and in court for the purpose of seeing that I got my full deserts.

The case was opened. The crown counsel addressed the court and jury, outlining his case. He undertook to show that I had murdered "Shylock" Smith, *alias* Joseph Aloysius Byrnes, as a result of a quarrel over a woman, and that after the crime I had attempted to rob the deceased and was interrupted in the latter act by the arrival of the police. The

prosecution also undertook to show that there was ill-feeling between the murdered man and me and that I had various reasons for killing Smith; also, that I was a violent man and was expert in various methods of self-defence and aggression. Finally, he would show that I was the only person present in the particular vicinity of the park at the time of the murder.

Mr. Murray outlined his case with an optimism that he must have been far from feeling. He would show that I was an innocent man, a victim of circumstances, and quite guiltless of even complicity; that I had been accidentally a witness of the commission of the crime and that, for some reason which he would endeavour to make clear to the jury, I refused to betray the identity of the person who had actually committed the crime. Finally, he said, he would place the accused himself in the witness-box and let the jury judge for itself of the true inwardness of the matter.

This was as much news to me as it seemed discomforting to the crown counsel. I knew that against my will I could not be called upon to testify, but I could not see that it would make any difference in the end, while it might allow Mr. Murray the spectacular opportunity by which he hoped to draw public attention to himself as a rising young lawyer. Very well. Mr. Murray should have his chance. It was the least I could grant in order to show my gratitude for his efforts on my behalf. Also, I had a desire to go on record with my own lips as an innocent man.

The trial began. For a case in which a man's life was at stake, the proceedings were brief. I will be even briefer about them. From the outset, Mr. Murray's prophecy was apparent fact. The court and jury seemed to attach little importance to the case. It was an everyday, lower-class murder, muddy in its results but seeming clear enough in its motives.

But there were some surprises in it for me. The prosecution called Constable McNab, who established that a murder had been committed. He surprised me by also "establishing" that I was the person who committed it! Imbued with a detective enthusiasm suggestive of much study of Gaboriau and Conan Doyle, the Highlander had been busy.

The prosecutor helped him to show that when he saw me waiting for "the veiled woman" at the park gate, I had been smoking a cigar, and had presently thrown it away. He produced the butt of this cigar and also another butt which he found in the rhododendron bush where heel-prints in the soft earth showed where the "assassin" had crouched. A cigar-maker was presently called who said the cigars were of the same make, shape, and quality and were doubtless purchased at the same time.

Mr. Murray did not deny that his client was at the scene of the murder as well as at the gate, but fiercely combated the suggestion that I smoked a cigar while crouching in the bush, waiting to pounce upon my victim. It was absurd! He pointed out that Smith and I lived at the same tavern, drank in the same bar, and had probably taken our cigars from the same box; which was the fact of the matter.

Then the prosecutor began his reconstruction of the crime through the order in which he called his witnesses. Detective Quinlan was now able to identify me as John Price, though not as Jim Lefferts, the notorious bank breaker. A photograph of myself, forwarded to San Francisco, had been identified by the editor of a Sunday newspaper with whom Byrnes and I had done business. Furthermore, affidavits taken in the seafaring quarter of 'Frisco known as the "Barbary Coast," showed that the man being knocked down in the Coffin Island picture was one Jake Jermyn, who had been heard of last as mate of the whaler *Seabreeze*, aboard which Smith and I had fled San Francisco. As the *Seabreeze* had not returned to port and as the Coffin Island picture showed a background of tropical vegetation, it was to be presumed that Smith and I had deserted at one of the South Sea Islands. Then all trace of us was lost until Smith turned up in New York and, later, both of us together in Glasgow on the day before the murder.

The object of this testimony was to show that I was John Price, the comrade and probably criminal accomplice of "Shylock" Smith. The introduction of the snapshots—especially that one showing Byrnes and me together on the deck of the tramp steamer—indicated our close intimacy and that we had sailed together on a steamship before or after the voyage on the *Seabreeze*. Prior to our arrival at San Francisco it was believed that we had come around the Horn from the region of French Guienne, but the police had been unable to establish our movements

definitely, or the name of the steamer on which we had travelled.

It was a relief to hear this. They had not identified the tramp steamer. They had been unable to trace me further back than San Francisco. The link between John Price and my father's son of Trinidad and Glasgow was missing.

The hotel clerk gave the date of my appearance at the Crown Tavern and my movements thereafter, as he knew them. The prosecutor asked him one question that made me uneasy. Had I been absent one day on a trip down the Clyde? The clerk said that I had mentioned that I was going down the Clyde and would not return. He remembered it because I *did* come back, after all, just about the time Mr. Jonson registered at the tavern. In cross-examination the clerk admitted to Mr. Murray that I "seemed a decent sort of chap" and except for "carrying on that night with Mr. Jonson" he was surprised to hear that I was in trouble with the police.

The barmaid came next and told her story, making the most out of the "quarrel over a woman" and how I had knocked Mr. Jonson down. She also said that on the previous evening I had made a remark about "suspicious gold" when Mr. Jonson put a sovereign on the bar. Mr. Murray did not greatly succeed in offsetting this serious testimony.

The constable was then recalled by the prosecution and asked to repeat his story of the meeting of "the veiled woman" and of the later events in the park. The time of these happenings was shown to be a few hours after the quarrel in the bar.

On my behalf, Mr. Murray asked the constable about the heel-marks in the turf under the rhododendron bush and brought out the fact that the regular path, being made of cement, would hardly show foot-prints. The constable supposed that the "assassin"—he loved the word—crept on his victim from behind. He then had to admit that there were no marks of any sort on the turf behind the bench, although the lawn was soft enough to show where I had first left the path to escape observation and where I had come out of the rhododendron bush afterward. It was a good point for the defence, for why should an assassin come out openly and approach Smith from the *front* after crouching in the bush right *behind* his victim?

Mr. Murray perked up after this and cross-examined the following witnesses, the police surgeon and Doctor Trevor, with a perilous self-confidence. The police surgeon's testimony did not operate against me, while, on the other hand, Mr. Murray got him to admit that the attack must have been made from the front. The position of the thumb marks on the throat indicated this beyond doubt.

Doctor Trevor was an important witness. There was a stir as he took the stand. Now the morbidly curious were to hear more of this sinister method of killing a man with the bare thumbs. After hearing his evidence upon the result of the autopsy, the prosecutor said:

"A very unusual way of doing away with a man, Doctor Trevor?"

"Very unique and remarkable," was the reply.

"It is not common in criminal annals?"

"So far as I am aware, there is no parallel **case** in British criminal annals."

"Would you consider it an ordinary criminal **who** did this?"

"I should consider the murderer no ordinary **one**."

"Do you think he learned that thumb trick in this country?"

"It is possible, were he a surgeon, or had some knowledge of anatomy, or——"

"Pardon me, doctor," interrupted the crown counsel. "All I asked was, *Do you think* he learned the trick in this country?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

"Possibly in Japan, where, I believe, the trick is not unknown."

"The witness is yours," said the prosecutor to Mr. Murray, who arose, inflated his chest, and said in a rather loud voice to Doctor Trevor:

"I have not objected to certain questions which you have answered here because I would like to have you answer me as to what *you think* about certain questions which I shall put to you. In the first place, will you state for the benefit of the jury precisely what you found at the autopsy as being the cause of the death of the man Smith?"

"I will be as precise as I can," said Doctor Trevor, frowning slightly at Murray's manner. "I found a dislocation of the odontoid process of the axis from its position between the anterior arch of the atlas and the odontoid ligament."

There was a faint titter in court. Even the judge smiled.

"Kindly translate the same into terms that the *jury* will comprehend," said Mr. Murray, a little humbly.

"The man had had his neck dislocated between the first and second vertebræ," said Doctor Trevor, obligingly, "which dislocation caused instantaneous death, the nerves controlling respiration and heart action being situated there."

"Thank you. Now, could a man have done this with his hands?"

"Most assuredly, if he knew how to do it."

"What do you mean by '*if he knew how to do it*'?"

"It would require some knowledge of anatomy, unless, of course, his fingers accidentally touched the vital spot. Also, it would require some strength, to say nothing of practice."

"Could not this have been pure accident? Remember, you admit no precedent."

"I can hardly conceive an accident," said the doctor. "The thing was done too neatly and *on both sides at once*. Also, there was no other damage done, as is almost invariably the case, according to Sir Frederick Treves, in cases of accident. Furthermore, I admitted only no *criminal* precedent in this country. It is a common fate among very young children—babies—when the head is allowed to fall back suddenly—sometimes in nursing."

"But no force is required there."

"Babies are not grown men," was the rejoinder. "It would take some strength as well as practice to kill a bull-necked man in this way."

"Would you consider the accused strong enough to do it?"

"Oh, any half-grown person is strong enough. The question I am not prepared to answer is whether he knew *how* to do it. If he knew anything, for instance, of the Japanese science of *jiu-jitsu*——"

"I object!" shouted Mr. Murray. "I ask that the reference to a supposition be stricken out. It has not been shown that my client knows anything about *jiu-jitsu*!"

"We propose to show that he does, your lordship," said the prosecutor, suavely.

Mr. Murray started, as did I. What now? My advocate glowered helplessly at his opponent, then at Doctor Trevor. After a few unimportant, almost irrelevant, questions, he plumped down in his chair with a sigh of exasperation and despair.

The prosecutor arose, bowed to Doctor Trevor, and called the next witness. If I felt depressed before I was now filled with hopelessness. The latest witness was the pasty-faced steward who had insulted Jess aboard the *Peveril of the Peak*!

He glanced at me with no love in his eyes. No doubt he had identified my picture in the newspapers and voluntarily come forward, actuated by a desire to even his score with me.

He took the oath, gave his name as Henry Collins, and answered the preliminary questions. Then he was led to tell all about that day on the *Peveril*. The girl who was with me on that occasion he described as "a little pick-up," but I could see the jury at once connect her with the woman of the park gate two days later.

The waiter admitted that he had flirted with the girl, but maintained that my attack on him was unwarranted and prompted by jealous rage, as I had "had my eye on the same girl" and had, in fact, "picked her up" on the deck afterward. Later, he had seen us together, strolling arm in arm on the esplanade at Rothesay.

"The accused seems to have been ever ready with his hands," the prosecutor murmured, but loud enough for the jury to hear and smile their agreement. The remark called forth a rebuke from the bench.

Collins, the pasty-faced witness, then described the attack. He was "a bit handy with the gloves" himself, he averred, but "this fellow was too sudden and didn't fight accordin' to Markis of Queensb'ry."

"It was some foreign trick," said he. "He just at me, not with his fists, but with his open hands and some fancy hold. I just turned a cartwheel and landed on my back with all the wind knocked out o' me."

Mr. Murray could do nothing with this man, except to make him prejudice his moral character before the jury.

That, in brief, was the case for the crown. Then Mr. Murray arose and told the court that he had been unable to find a single witness who knew me or anything about the case, except those who had already been called by the prosecutor. He proposed, as a last resort, to place the prisoner himself upon the stand.

His lordship asked me if I had any objection to

testifying, warning me that if I did so I could also be examined by the prosecution. I said I had no objection, but that I should reply only to such questions as I saw fit to answer.

The moment I was in the witness-box I realized more than ever that more than half of Mr. Murray's intention was to vindicate himself, the rest being a hope that the jury would be convinced that I was shielding the actual criminal and was not myself the murderer.

At first the advocate asked me questions that he knew I would answer—that I did not commit the murder, that I did not know how to kill a man with my thumbs, and that I saw the murder committed. Although I would not give a definite reply to the question, it seemed clear enough that I knew the identity of the real murderer.

Then, ever glancing at the jury, Murray hurled a volley of questions that he knew I would refuse to answer. He seemed to take delight in the emphasis, or monotony, with which I declined to tell what my real name was, whether my parents were alive, what the quarrel in the bar was about, where I had got the nineteen sovereigns, the name of the lady of the steamer and the park gate, the name of the murderer, etc., etc. Finally, he looked at the jury, spread out his hands, shrugged his shoulders, and sat down with a fine assumption of despair when I refused to say why I was imperilling my own life to protect the real culprit.

I prepared for an onslaught when the prosecutor arose to cross-examine me. He eyed me curiously

for a moment or two. I think it was genuine curiosity. I think he also was sorry for me.

"You have lived in Japan?" he said, as if he did not wholly like his task.

"For a short time."

"While there did you learn anything of *jiu-jitsu*?"

"A little," I admitted. It would have been impolite to refuse to answer.

"Are you the person who assaulted Henry Collins on the steamer, *Peveril of the Peak*?"

"I am."

"Did you employ the science of *jiu-jitsu* on that occasion?"

"I did—but it was a very simple movement."

"You did—but it was a very simple movement. Thank you. That is all."

The prosecutor smiled at the jury, then informed the court that he was ready to make his address. When he had finished I had not a leg left to stand on. Furthermore, he took the wind out of Mr. Murray's sails by paying a sarcastic compliment to the defence. He said the attempt to prove me innocent by making my guilt so seemingly clear that it sounded preposterously like a noble effort to shoulder another's guilt was one of the most brilliant ideas ever born of a pleader's imagination.

After that, Mr. Murray's speech, which was a plea for my innocence along the exact line forecast by the prosecutor, fell as flat as a stale jest. It was not even received politely. Mr. Murray did his best with the straws that he had gleaned on my behalf—

no evidence to show previous bad character—the front attack—the absurdity of smoking a cigar in the rhododendron bush with murder in my heart, etc., etc. But the jury yawned!

The judge's summing was very brief. It was clear that the bench considered me as guilty as if a score of witnesses had testified to seeing me kill Byrnes. The jury was out only two minutes. The verdict was guilty, as charged!

The judge looked severely at me. After hearing me declare that the only reason I could think of why sentence should not be passed upon me was that I was quite guiltless, his lordship drew a black cap from a little drawer, placed it on his head and, with a sort of indifferent solemnity, sentenced me to death by hanging!

His hope that the Lord would have mercy where he, himself, could not see his way clear, died away in an incoherent mumble.

There was a crowd assembled outside to see "Jack the Thumb-Killer" placed in the Black Maria. I was closely guarded, but the crowd on either side was within touching distance as the procession paused while the door of the prison wagon was being opened to receive me.

All at once I heard a whispering voice almost at my ear. I alone could have heard it and only through immediate proximity, for there was steady murmuring of the crowd.

Good friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.

It was such a remarkable utterance at such a moment that I turned sharply.

There, almost at my elbow, stood Daniel Bunthorne!

His face was ghastly. Beads of sweat stood upon it. His eyes looked straight into mine, nevertheless, and in them was a depth of meaning and pleading that fairly cried a message.

Next instant I was hustled into the Black Maria and the door was closed with a vicious slam.

CHAPTER XV

I CHANGE MY TUNE

I HAD plenty to think about on the way from the court where I had been condemned to death and the prison where, in due course, that sentence should see execution.

Far from being miserable, or even depressed, I was actually relieved to know that the trial was over, suspense at an end, and the certainty of my position established. Indeed, I felt stimulated in face of the fact that now, if I was to save myself, I must fight.

It should not be thought that at any time *I had* been resigned to even the chance of going to the gallows. I had merely been temporizing so that Bunthorne should have every chance to decide upon a definite attitude and come forward with it, so that my own action should have been deferred until the last moment and I should feel thoroughly justified in whatever course I ultimately adopted.

Now I thought I saw Bunthorne's position and his choice of attitude. It was the same as my own, objectively—to protect Jess. We were each to pay a heavy price for the privilege of doing so. At the first glance it would seem that I was to pay the heavier price—to sacrifice everything that is summed up in the word "life." Bunthorne, in the

same glance, was to pay nothing. Yet, on second thought, I believed mine was the lighter sacrifice.

I was merely to cancel a misguided life under a false identity. My parents would continue in blissful ignorance of the fate of their son. Jess would soon forget, or remember me only as one who did not meet the test of genuine love and went his selfish way. This last was a bitter thought, but it concerned a misunderstanding not without advantage to all concerned.

On the other hand, Bunthorne was to save his miserable life and continue to suffer its burden for his daughter's sake. Death seemed a lighter penalty, it seemed to me, than the one that Jess's father must endure through all the rest of his days. What must the man suffer all his life to know and remember that he had allowed an innocent man—and his daughter's lover—to go to the scaffold in his stead!

His suffering of atonement had begun already, and already I felt that he had the heavier load to carry. It was certain now that he knew—had known from the morning after the crime—that I was the scapegoat chosen by the grim god of ill chance. He probably knew, too, that I loved Jess and that Jess loved me. That first blow—the discovery that it was I who was in the hands of the police—must have been stunning, a twist on Fate's rack that must have been excruciating.

I took his presence on the pavement outside the courthouse to mean that he had been present at the trial. I thought over all that had transpired at that session and a chill went up and down my spine to

imagine even what Bunthorne must have passed through in hearing certain details of evidence.

Had it been a relief to him to see the mesh close around me? Or had each added strand of the web squeezed a red sweat from his agonized heart?

Of course he had forced himself to be present, to go through that ordeal, in order that he might see for himself exactly how he was situated, what stand I had taken, and whether I intended to help him protect Jess. That, I supposed, was the attitude he had taken. I was not sure that I was finally willing to support it, or, at least, that I would continue to uphold it. I had yet to consider this, for my life was now in the balance. As I say, I was not *resigned* to going to the gibbet for anybody's sake, although I might possibly do so whether I would or no.

Yes, Bunthorne's attitude seemed very clear for the moment. It had come like a statement from his eyes in that moment by the Black Maria. The agony attending his position had cried from the pallor of his face and the beads of sweat upon his brow. I preferred to think this than that these were symptoms of craven fear or cowardice. His words had been a mystery at first, but the solution had come like a stroke of lightning out of a cloud of darkness.

Good friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.

It was like Daniel Bunthorne to convey his thought in some quotation from a favourite author. What he meant William Shakespeare to say for him was:

"Let things remain as they are."

But was there no more than that? The echo of the quiet voice was still in my ears. Was there not a peculiar sharpening of the "e", as in Jess, rather than the softening in the Holy Name? Did he mean—

Good friend, for *Jess's* sake, forbear——?

I was sure that this was the secret of the chosen quotation. He must have known that the couplet would convey nothing to any one but me. It would have passed other ears as the somewhat inapposite advice of an erratic moralizer.

The prison that I was taken to on this occasion was arrived at after considerable travelling. I had no idea at the time where it was situated and, for reasons stated at the beginning of this history, I do not propose to reveal its name and whereabouts now. No doubt it is still standing in the same place.

Again my pedigree was taken, and now a new fear assailed me. It occurred to me that now I was convicted and condemned, the beard that had concealed my identity so long *would be shaved off*.

But was it fear or hope? If I were identified as my father's son by someone who had known me in the other days—and my face was known to thousands in Glasgow—*there* would be a solution of my difficulties, and yet through no voluntary betrayal of Bunthorne or Jess on my part. Yet that identification meant shame and notoriety for my parents.

Strange how, whenever the revelation of my identity seemed imminent, I thought more of the sorrow to my parents than of the attendant sorrow to

Jess Bunthorne. After all, I may have been mistaken in the analysis of my own motives throughout the whole affair.

I was both relieved and disappointed when it became apparent that, under the regulations, a condemned man is not shaved although temporarily clothed in prison garb. I was to remain John Sheffield. Therefore my destiny lay within the scope of my own actions. Fate had withdrawn from the affair and, like the stage-manager when his work is done, was sitting back to watch what the principal actor made of the situation.

I was placed in one of the cells reserved for those to death addressed.

Now I had time to think over matters; but as the days went past—lonely, silent, interminable days—my thinking brought me no satisfaction, unless the comfort of proving one's self a fool.

I had allowed matters to go too far. I was now cut off from the world that might help me if I desired help. I had gone beyond the point where by implicating Bunthorne I could save my parents. I was already tried and condemned. To charge Bunthorne at this late hour could only mean greater notoriety in a new trial, greater still if it came to a trial of Bunthorne.

And suppose, did I open my lips, Bunthorne chose to deny that he knew anything about the park murder, that he had even been near the park on that fatal night? Who was there to gainsay him, except a man who had already been convicted for the crime, a man who, it was natural to suppose, would go to any

extreme to save himself? Nobody would believe me! There was no evidence against Bunthorne—not a particle! I could not get a new trial upon an unsupported charge against another man.

There was Jess, of course. She could prove that her father knew Byrnes. She knew enough to support a theory that Byrnes had been blackmailing her father. She could testify that Bunthorne had gone with Byrnes to the park that night and that I had merely followed to watch. She could also testify as to her father's return to the house in Chamber's Close—the time—his actions—his apparent frame of mind. He must have been in an obviously wrought-up condition.

But would Jess do it? And did I wish to expose her to such an ordeal? Was it not virtually forcing her to do that from which I (and Bunthorne apparently) sought to spare her?—the knowledge that he was a murderer—the necessity of betraying her father or choosing to let her lover be betrayed.

"Bunthorne, apparently, sought to spare her!" Ah, there was the bone that persisted in sticking in my throat. Was it wholly for her sake that he kept silence? Was it wholly for her sake, or to save his own skin, that he lived the peculiar life he did?

And what sort of life was that? After all the diverting thoughts of personal peril during those last few weeks, *I had quite forgotten that I was no nearer a solution of Bunthorne's secret!*

All at once I sprang to my feet in that condemned cell. I found myself gripping the bars of the door with a wild impulse to shake them, to summon the

warders, to demand that I be taken before the prison governor, to declare with my own lips that there had been a great mistake, a terrible miscarriage of justice.

Who was Bunthorne, after all? What did I know about him? Nothing that was not suspicious! What dark secret was it that could be preserved only by the silencing of Joseph Aloysius Byrnes?

"He could have been no ordinary criminal who did this," Doctor Trevor had said.

Yet Bunthorne had done it—had killed that man with his bare thumbs. How had he done it? Where had he learned that trick? What *was* the trick?

"I cannot conceive an accident," Doctor Trevor had said.

It was no accident. Bunthorne was no ordinary criminal. He was the criminal extraordinary. It would be like such a man to stop at nothing to achieve his own ends. Had Byrnes not charged him in my hearing with being a traitor to his kind? Had Bunthorne not practically admitted in my hearing that he had gained his freedom from prison by some clever double-dealing with the authorities?

What a fool I had been! But I would be a fool no longer, nor would any fool me! Bunthorne must now look out for himself; at least he must give an accounting of that secret. I was sorry for Jess—and I use a feeble word to express my feeling toward her; but if what I suddenly suspected of Bunthorne was true—and I was not to be blamed if I misjudged him—my life was at stake against his secret—then Jess must inevitably suffer sooner or later for her.

father. Better that she do so now and for a good cause. Better that she take the dilemma by the horns, face the worst, discover her own place among mankind, save her father from a greater crime than murder in hot blood, and—to be humanly candid about the matter—rescue me from an unearned ignominy and undeserved fate!

But I would stand by her in any event. I would win sympathy for her by the statement before the whole world that for her sake—and her sake alone—I had shielded her father from the law; that she was deserving of the utmost sympathy, which I had given to her. I would state that at the time of my trial I believed I was doing right, but that now I saw things differently, saw that my sacrifice would be ineffectual toward the assuring of her happiness, and that it were a kindness that she be forced to suffer the inevitable now instead of later.

Then I would make amend by taking her away with me to some other end of the world. But would she marry me?—*could* she, after I had sent her father to the gallows or back to life servitude? Could Jess and I ever find happiness with that shadow relentlessly walking between us, even though we builded our nest at the north pole?

Anyway, I was at her service if she could find any consolation in the devotion that I would lay at her feet as a penance if nothing else.

In the meantime, the issue must be met squarely. But how was I to proceed? I was already condemned, I had no money with which to employ counsel. I was wise enough in the world's ways to

know that no advocate would take up my case for nothing, even if he chose to believe there was a word of truth in my story. It was only my word against Bunthorne's, with Jess an unwilling witness. If Bunthorne denied the charge, my case weakened. If Jess refused to betray her father, my case collapsed. The sentence of death would not only stand but have no chance of favourable consideration by the Home Secretary. I would be in a position of one who, in desperation, had tried to thrust my own guilt upon "an innocent man!"

The days passed—days of mental torture. I had realized my situation at last. Away with Quixotism! Nearly a week had slipped by. I was to die at 8 o'clock on the morning of the Monday after three Sundays had elapsed from the day of sentence. In sixteen days more I must walk to the gallows. Sixteen days! . . .

Now it was fifteen. To-morrow it would be fourteen. Much to do and little time to do it. How to proceed? What to do first?

Then Fate, perhaps a little relenting at the difficulties of the principal actor, extended a hand into the game again. There remained but twelve days between me and death, and still no move on the part of Bunthorne, nor did I expect any. I was still debating what I should do and how to do it, when the door of my cell was thrown open and I was told by a warder that there was someone to see me. My heart gave a great leap, Bunthorne!—at last!

I was taken to a grating which ran along in front of the cells. The light was dim in the corridor, but

my eyes, used to a deeper gloom, noticed that there were three men beyond the grating. Two of them were guards. The one in the middle was an elderly, light-haired man with spectacles.

If my heart had leaped at the thought of Bunthorne, it now stopped beating momentarily at recognition of this man.

It was our family lawyer, Alexander Lowndes!

I took an involuntary step backward into the shadows, my heart sick and shamed for what I had brought upon my father and mother. My identity had been penetrated. Everything was known. He was here as my father's emissary.

He may have noticed my backward step and thought he understood it, for he turned to the guards.

"I think you know me, gentlemen," said he, in his quiet, honest way. "I am not here to defeat the ends of justice; rather to assist justice. Whatever latitude you can possibly allow me for a minute or two with this man will be greatly appreciated."

It was not according to regulations that any latitude should be allowed in conversation with a condemned man, but Alexander Lowndes was a great man in the affairs of law, and it may have been that the governor, whose permit to see me he carried, had also dropped a hint to the warders. Anyway, they drew back a little and relaxed attention.

"Well?" said Lowndes in a kindly way, turning to the grating, to which I had come closer in order to facilitate the privacy he desired.

"Well, Uncle Sandy," I said, brokenly.

He started. He peered through the grating at me.

Then his big, capable hands gripped the bars. I saw his knuckles strained to whiteness.

"My God!—*John!*" he gasped.

Then I could have raved in exasperation. As usual, my judgment had been all wrong. He had not known me at all!

For a few seconds Mr. Lowndes stood there, staring and muttering. I could hear him repeating my name over and over, at first with amazement, then horror, then infinite regret and, lastly, great sorrow.

It was I who broke the spell.

"Mr. Lowndes," I said, "Heaven forgive me for making that mistake. I thought you knew me—seeing you there. I thought—Oh!" I groaned, "if it affects you so, what of my mother—my father——?"

I think it no shame to say that I completely broke down and laid my head against the grating. At this display my visitor rallied.

"Come, come, lad," said he, just as he used to do at the Rollers when a situation needed reforming. "It's not so bad as that. You're innocent. I keened that before I came here, never thinking it was you, never dreaming ye were within five thousand miles o' home."

Oh, but it was good to hear his honest Scotch tongue again!

"Now that I ken it's you, Jock, why—I've got a lot mair to fight for—eh? Maybe I conseeder it a fortunate circumstance."

"But, Mr. Lowndes—Uncle Sandy!" I said, "promise me that you will tell them nothing."

"It a' depends," said he. "I'll have to think.

This has taken my breath away. First, let me hear your story. Tell me the truth, Johnnie lad—the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

“Sir,” I said, firmly, “I’ll tell you nothing without, first, your promise that my father and mother shall know nothing about it. Otherwise, you can go and break their hearts and have done no good by coming here.”

Mr. Lowndes scratched his chin.

“Well, I’m not sure that I could very well tell them as matters stand the now,” said he. “I couldna very well tell them unless there was some hope of getting you clear.”

“Make it a promise, Mr. Lowndes. Not a word until I *am* clear. Not a word from me otherwise!”

“I’d be sweirt to hurt them,” said he, after some thought. “I’ll promise ye, John.”

(“Lord help us—it’s Johnnie!” he muttered under his breath. He was still staggered.)

“But what brought you here, if you didn’t know it was I?”

“Hoot!” said Lowndes. “That’s a mere whiffle. I saw the case in the papers. That silence o’ yours was curious—very curious. I got curious mysel’ when I met young Murray and had a crack wi’ him. He hasna had a deal o’ experience, yon young man, though maybe I couldna ha’ done better mysel’ wi’ the material he had.

“But it was evident to me, Jock, that there had been a miscarriage o’ justice, although I’m not blaming the judge nor the jury. ’Twas your own doing. What for? says I, not knowing it was you. It was

the *case* I was interested in. What was the young man holding back? For why?"

He eyed me steadily, then said:

"Jock, do ye think it's for the best in the long run to save a lassie from the disgrace o' having a brother who is a murderer, even if ye *are* heid ower heels in love wi' her?"

"It isn't her brother," said I.

"Man Jock," said he, not a whit put out, "ye'll not have been such a fool as to go stravaigin' wi' the man's wife?"

"If that were the case, I'd be willing to make her a widow, wouldn't I?"

"Naturally. It was a foolish bit o' reasoning on my part," said Lowndes, nodding his head. "Of *course* it's her father. That makes it clear. That makes it worse. That explains everything. She couldna be expectit to send her father to the rope, and ye couldna be expectit to bring disgrace on the bit lass. Ay, ay. So that's the deeficulty. And ye had a thought for yer ain folk, too. I see. I see."

I was so admiring of his mental penetration that I had no thought to deny the accuracy of his deductions.

"Now, John, will ye lay the matter before me? I'll be discreet. I'll find a way out. But the main thing is—ye've got to be saved!"

I took a few turns up and down behind the grating. I had come to the casting of the die that so involved Jess Bunthorne. I still hesitated to bring sorrow upon her, inevitably as it must come for her sooner or later, but the more heavily if after my death.

My mind had been made up, however. Besides, Fate had been good to me for once. It had sent me the *means* for fighting for my life—not only the best criminal lawyer in Scotland, Alexander Lowndes, but a personal friend who would not proceed without consideration for those who might innocently be involved.

I told him my story, omitting only the names of Jess and her father and of the alley in which they lived.

“Now,” said I, “before I give you the keys to the story, tell me what you think.”

“I see your position and your attitude clear enough, John,” said he, gravely. “It is deserving o’ commendation—at least, your motive. I see the lass’s fix forbye, and it’s heartbreaking—that it is. But I’ll be candid. I’ve nae manner o’ use for that father. An honest man has nae business to hae a secret that, to keep safe, he must send an innocent man to the gallows, especially for a crime that he committed himself. It’ll have to be a very remarkable secret, John, that will change my opeenion of him. Ye will have no idea what it is?”

“None whatever.”

“Then what do ye expect me to do without knowing his name or where to find him? Put him in my hands. Let me talk with him five minutes. I havena examined criminals for thirty year for nothing, John. I’ll get to the bottom of it in a jiffy. And I’ll not hurt the lass more than I can help, or more than may be the best thing for her in the end.”

“That’s the other promise I want from you,” I

said. "Go cautiously for her sake. I loved the girl, Uncle Sandy, and she's as pure, sweet, and innocent——"

"Ay, ay," he interrupted, dryly, "but that doesna ease the crick in your neck, Jock."

"I daresay, but—— Well, do this for me. Go to the man. Say nothing to the girl—nothing whatever, you understand. Have a private talk with her father. Ask him why, aside from Jess, his neck should be saved at the expense of mine. Say that I demand to know his secret and what was his justification for the crime. Then talk to him as a lawyer—for or against, as your best judgment dictates.

"His name is Daniel Bunthorne and he lives at the top end of Chamber's Close."

So, there! My secret was out!

"Humph!" grunted Alexander Lowndes with immense satisfaction. "I'll be pleased to meet ye, Mister Bunthorne."

He shook a finger with me through the grating.

"Jock," said he, with a chuckle, "I'll see ye again the morn's afternoon."

CHAPTER XVI

POWERS UNSEEN

BUT Alexander Lowndes did not return to the prison on "the morn's afternoon," neither at any time during the following day nor on the day after that.

When Sandy Lowndes failed an appointment there was some serious reason behind the dereliction. I knew the man and his ancient ways and awaited his coming with no little anxiety, feverishly pacing the narrow limits of the cell and coming to an abrupt halt at every little noise in the prison—the opening or closing of a door, the sound of a footfall, the first stroke of a distant clock.

Now that the die was cast, now that I had taken action in committing my secret to Alexander Lowndes, there was nothing to do but the hardest thing of all—to wait! Why did he not return? What was detaining him day after day? There remained but nine days to that fatal Monday. No news might be good news in most matters, but never where Alexander Lowndes failed an appointment. It could only mean that he had no progress to report. He had met with some serious obstacle.

But two things served to break the monotony of those horrible days. At first I hardly noticed, or

was in the least thankful for them. But as the better part of a week went by without bringing my old friend, I began to welcome the appearance of the prison doctor and the chaplain. They took my mind temporarily from the torturing question that filled the rest of my time! What had become of Lowndes?

Doctor Dixon was a little gray man with a keen eye. He had served in India and his temperament seemed to have absorbed the fervour of curry, chutnee, and sunstroke. He told me at the beginning of our acquaintance that his business, worse luck, was to keep me in excellent condition, so that I should feel life worth living when called upon to give it up.

"If you were sick and tired of life when you came to the rope," said he, as if he expected me to argue about the matter, "where'd the law get its pound of flesh—hey? What I may think about it myself is none of your business, sir, and it's none of mine to express it."

Then he glared at me and said that he didn't think I was sensitive enough to suffer much, anyway. He supposed that most criminals were callous and that this was the reason why capital punishment was staged "like a Drury Lane melodrama!"

"Nothing else would appeal to the brutes," he snorted. "Otherwise the government could save time and money. Demme, all they need's a hypodermic. Clean job and no fuss. But no! They've got to sing Cock Robin with a Greek chorus. 'Who'll toll the bell?' *Rot!*"

Doctor Dixon seemed quite regardless of regulations

or warders. I do not think he was supposed to speak to a prisoner more than was necessary, especially one condemned to death; but he did as he pleased and none of the death-watch checked him. A snort and a glare from the doctor were perhaps as disconcerting as a lecture from the governor.

He seemed much interested either in me or in my case. One day, after I had made a remark, he looked up sharply.

"Thought so," said he. "Glasgow? Edinbro?"

"Edinbro," I said, telling him what I had refused to reveal to Doctor Helmar.

"Medical?"

"No—and not much of anything else."

"Humph!" he grunted, glancing at my hands.

Another day he brought me a little line drawing, a diagram cut, apparently, from some book.

"Curious, isn't it?" said he.

I took the diagram and turned it about, trying to make out what it represented. It was a kind of irregular oval with a gap between two inturning points. When I turned the gap side up it looked not unlike a pair of crumpled horns. Evidently the thing represented some portion of human or animal anatomy.

The doctor snorted and snatched the thing from me.

"You know no more about it than I do about the *rationale* of verse—whatever that is!" he snorted. Then he glared at me and asked, as if I must understand what he was talking about: "What in thunder for? Where's the sense? Life isn't a tuppenny novel, you idiot!"

With that he left me. But he was very kind from that day on.

The chaplain was a dreamy sort of fellow whose sole ambition seemed to be to pump as much cut-and-dried religion into me as my system would hold. His duty was to offer me every chance of salvation that I cared to grasp. I let him go as far as he cared to, forcing myself to take an interest in order to divert my thoughts.

One day he read to me from the Book of Genesis. It was the story of Cain and Abel; how Cain, after slaying his brother, was made an outcast and vagabond with a mark upon his brow, "lest any finding should slay him."

"*And the Lord said,*" the chaplain read, "*. . . whosoever slayeth Cain vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.*"

"How do you reconcile that with capital punishment?" I asked.

Then we had an argument, somewhat merry on one side, very solemn on the other. Despite the contradicting law of Moses, I cornered him. He admitted it by taking refuge in anger. He went away, saying that it would be better for me to shrive my soul than quote Scripture against laws presumably based upon righteousness. We were stiff toward one another after that.

Only five days lay between me and the date of execution when Lowndes came again to the prison. After a single glance at him my heart became as lead. Something had gone wrong. He had aged considerably. He had lost flesh. His face was

drawn and pale, his eyes weary with anxiety. He looked like a man who had not slept in a week and had been incessant in some employ.

As before, the guards allowed him some latitude in conversation with me.

"Johnnie," said he (and he scarcely smiled as he greeted me at the grating), "I fear I have no good news for ye."

"So I see. Did you find Bunthorne? What did he say?"

"There's the mischief," said he. "I have not been able to lay hands on the man. I haven't even had a glim o' his face."

"You don't mean——?"

"He's gone! He's disappeared!"

Here was a blow I had hardly looked for. Suspicious as I had become of Bunthorne's true motives, I had never dreamed that he would so assure his own or Jess's safety as by deliberately abandoning me to my fate.

"By heaven, Mr. Lowndes!" I cried. "This is too much. *Now* I'll change my tune again! You can throw consideration to the winds as far as I am concerned, if Bunthorne has done this. Inform the police. Hold back nothing. Scotland Yard will find this man quick enough, even if he's hiding in the bogs of Ireland! Find him, Mr. Lowndes. I'll not tolerate *this*!"

"Hold on, John! Hold on," said Lowndes, shaking his head. "I haven't been doing nothing all these days. I hadna the heart to come back without trying everything, although the Lord knows I haven't got much for my trying."

"I went to the house in Chamber's Close," he began his report. "It was locked up. It had just been rented by the month. The landlord keened nothing about his tenants, although they had been in the house more than five years, but thought they were genteel appearing folk. He said they had gone away a few days before——"

"Yes, as soon as he saw me convicted and sentenced," I interrupted, wrothily.

"Keep cool, laddie. Growlin' doesna pick a bone, ye ken. . . . Well, I tried to find where they'd gone—by the carrier that took their luggage. They went by train from St. Enoch's station; and there I lost track."

"Assuredly you did. He's adept at disappearing—adept from long practice. Jess—his daughter—told me enough to make that clear. He was probably suffering from a cold, too, poor man! You should have called in the police."

"I did," said Lowndes, patiently, "if ye would give me a chance to tell it to ye. I went to the police and told them I wanted this man's whereabouts established. I didna go into details at first, hoping to arrange things quietly with Mr. Bunthorne, so as to save as much exposure as I could for you and your auld folk and the bit lass.

"And here's where things got deefficult. The police kind o' smiled and said I was hunting a mare's nest. They said they had no doubt of your guilt, and you were judged and condemned and the case was considered closed. Even when I said I believed this Bunthorne was at least an eye-witness to the

murder, they were stubborn and said that that would only tend to confirm the justice of your sentence. Besides, they said, in investigating the case at the start, they had made a search for the woman you met at the park gate. They judged she lived in the neighbourhood, as you lived at the Crown, and you had met her probably at a place handy for both of you."

"Well?"

"Well," said Mr. Lowndes, trouble deepening on his face, "they said they hadna overlooked the Bunthorne family and were quite satisfied neither father nor daughter ha' had anything to do with the affair."

"Did they tell you why they were so satisfied?"

"No, but they seemed mighty cocksure. I think they were even surer than they told me. But they said they would find Mr. Bunthorne and question him again. They attached no significance to the man's flitting, saying that if he'd flitted before the trial it might have been different."

"Fine police reasoning when dealing with a criminal extraordinary like Daniel Bunthorne."

"Maybe. But they went to work; at least, they said they did. Not content, I put a private detective on the track. Some days later the police admitted to me that they had traced and found Bunthorne. They had talked with him and were more than ever satisfied that he could not have had any connection with the crime. My assertion that he had, that, in fact, I had reason to believe that he was the murderer himself, made them laugh in my face.

"I had to admit that it was you who told me this, and they laughed all the more and wanted to know if I was so getting on in years that I had no more sense than to believe what a condemned man told me. Of *course* you were innocent! Every man the government hanged was innocent!

"I think they were against me, John, because I was trying to spoil a pretty conviction and prove them all a set of dunderheads. They refused to tell me where Bunthorne was to be found and advised me to get some affidavits and some authority before I came to them demanding the production of anybody. But, in the meantime, the private detective——"

"Yes, the private detective," I interrupted. "Who is paying for him? Not my father? You haven't——?"

"Don't interrupt me, John," said the old gentleman, snappily. "I broke no promises, except the one about seeing you next day. . . . Well, the private detective, in the meantime, had also traced and talked with Bunthorne. And what do you suppose? The detective told me the same as the police: that I was barking up the wrong tree; that you were a crazy liar; that Bunthorne couldn't *possibly* have had anything to do with the crime. And he was grinning like an ape and downright amused at me for thinking any other way.

"John," Mr. Lowndes broke off, earnestly, "was yon the gospel truth ye told me?"

"As God sees me, sir, it was!"

"I believe ye, John," he said, simply. "I asked

the detective for his reasons. He said he couldn't give them. I asked him what he thought I—he was being paid for. He just said that if I wasn't satisfied he'd drop the case; which he did there and then. But first I asked him—and the alternative was that he sue for his dues—where he had found Bunthorne. He wasn't going to tell me at first. Then he changed his mind. When I had the address jotted down I sent him about his business.

"Next, I turned detective myself. The address was in a little village in Ayrshire. I went down and found that the detective had spoken the truth; but Bunthorne and his daughter had flitted again. They had been warned, I think. Maybe the detective knew that when he gave me the address.

"I made inquiries, but found out nothing, except that a man had come to their lodgings. He was described by the landlady as a stiff, upright sort of man. She thought he might have been a policeman. Others of his kind had called on Mr. Bunthorne, who, by the way, went by the name of Mr. Thompson. The landlady thought no good of Mr. and Miss Thompson and said she was glad to get rid of them, for hers was a respectable house.

"It was the 'stiff, upright sort of man' who came last and took charge of the Bunthornes' luggage and went away with them and left no word where they were going."

I could only shake my head in despair as Mr. Lowndes paused.

"John," said he, presently, in a strained voice, "is it possible, do you think, that the police are satisfied

with having somebody as a scapegoat and don't want to reopen the case? Is it possible that it was the police who, taking warning from my visits, helped the man out of that Ayrshire village and covered up his tracks?"

"It looks like it," I said, "and I have reason to believe that he is in some way protected by the authorities."

"So have I," said Mr. Lowndes, fiercely, "as I will tell you in a minute.

"Don't think I was done, John, although that was but two days ago. I went straight to Edinburgh where the Home Secretary happened to be. I had a slight acquaintance with him in his humbler days and my name was not unknown to him as, I make bold to say, it is not unknown to a great many in Scotland.

"He invited me in to see him. I found him a busy man and I did not waste much of his time. I told him your story and added my suspicions. He didn't take either very seriously. In fact, he discredited your story at the outset and said he was surprised that I should risk my reputation on behalf of a 'villainous, seafaring ruffian.'

"It was then that I hinted to him that you were nothing of the sort, but the only son of a man who bears a most honourable name in Glasgow. He seemed interested in that and asked me your father's name. I said I would rather not mention it, and justice could be dispensed quite as honestly without it.

"He agreed with me; in fact, he said that, after all, he would rather not hear it. It might make the per-

formance of his duty more painful. He said he did not see any reason for reopening the case, or even considering the modifying of your sentence. However, he promised to make inquiries about this Bunthorne and said that I might call again later in the afternoon.

"His inquiries must have been made by telegraph, for he was all ready for me when I came back in the afternoon. He was just getting ready to return to London and talked to me while he packed papers into a bag.

"‘Mr. Lowndes,’ said he, ‘I would advise you to drop the matter. Your client is deceiving you. Also, he has tried to unshoulder his guilt in the worst possible quarter for himself. He has even got the name wrong, although there can be no doubt it is the same person he has in mind.

"‘The Glasgow police,’ the Home Secretary said, ‘have made a thorough investigation, according to their reports to me—and I have never had reason to question their reports—and they assure me that the person charged by the condemned man could not possibly have had anything to do with the crime.’

"The Home Secretary also told me, John, that he had snatched a spare hour to examine the evidence in the case. He was even further satisfied of your guilt and that you deserved the full penalty as provided by law.

"‘Mr. Lowndes,’ said he, putting on his hat to go to the train, ‘for the sake of old acquaintance and your reputation as a lawyer, I will tell you who, or rather what, this so-called Bunthorne is, so that you

will perceive the absurdity of the whole affair. He is——

“John,” Mr. Lowndes broke off, his voice hoarse with some vainly repressed emotion, “what do you suppose he says the man is?”

“Tell me!” I cried. “It is a question that has tortured me long enough!”

“Why—the Home Secretary says he is the Deputy Sheriff of Scotland!”

CHAPTER XVII

THE DARK ANGEL

I HAVE but a vague recollection of how and when Mr. Lowndes left me. I was completely stunned. A voice, not at all like mine, cried somewhere in the prison:

"I don't care if he is the Lord Chief Justice! I saw him kill Joe Byrnes!"

Then there was some talk between Mr. Lowndes and the guards, much whispering and head-shaking. Before I was led back to the cell I think I heard Mr. Lowndes say something about seeing the Home Secretary again, something about leaving no stone unturned to find a key to this door of difficulty. But his words conveyed little meaning to me.

The rest of that day I sat in the half-gloom of the condemned cell, my head in my hands, my brain paralyzed, my heart like a frozen stone. The chaplain came. I told him to go away. I did not believe in his gods. The doctor came, made vain efforts to obtain speech from me, then went away with a shrug of his shoulders:

"Odd—very odd!" I heard him say.

So Daniel Bunthorne was an officer of the law, was he? It did not explain a great deal to me, except that his word would naturally be accepted by the police,

especially against mine. No doubt Bunthorne had had to do with the arresting and jailing of many a criminal in his day. No doubt I was regarded as some old law-breaker who (or some of whose friends) had felt his official clutch and now sought revenge.

A poor and fatally obvious way to try to effect it! I could quite understand why the police laughed at my charge, why the Home Secretary took little interest in the matter.

It was clear enough now what Joe Byrnes had meant by sneering at that comfortable home in Chamber's Close, "bought with the price of many a poor devil's sweat." I did not understand, however, how Byrnes should have power to blackmail the deputy sheriff, why Bunthorne should not have called the police, as indeed he had threatened to do, why he had not had the Devil's Island man arrested, or himself arrested him. Byrnes had apparently been "wanted."

But no! Bunthorne had chosen rather to kill!

So there it was—as much of a puzzle to me as ever. Bunthorne's being a high police official threw light on some things, but failed to explain quite a number of others.

In any event, I realized but one fact and the minor facts that pertained to it. Deputy Sheriff Bunthorne had killed a man, allowed me to be tried and condemned for it, and when brought under inquiry by Mr. Lowndes he had taken refuge behind his official identity. He had denied—I had no doubt of it now—*denied* that he knew any more about the murder than had appeared in the newspapers.

The brazen, cold-blooded hypocrite! And Jess? He had no more concern for her than a dog for its last year's offspring. His paternal affection was a pose, a pretense, a plausible excuse for all his otherwise inexplicable actions. Byrnes had challenged his pose, thinking to win hush money for keeping the shadow—whatever it was—from Jess's head, or from Jess's knowledge. Had he succeeded? No. He had died for his temerity.

I cast back to the beginnings of my own acquaintance with Bunthorne. Strange that destiny should have tapped at the inner doors of prescient consciousness that night when the flat-footed, flabby-cheeked man paused at my father's stoop. Then, later, under the street lamp:

"Do you know who I am? . . . It will be a matter of self-congratulation if you never make my closer acquaintance."

How destiny must have chuckled at my thoughtless answer:

"I am quite sure of it!"

I thought of the sympathy I had wasted on him at the waterside tavern, when he told me his story. Now I recalled that I had checked him in his narrative. Had I allowed him to go on, he might have told me everything and there would never have been any mystery. Yet had I known of his official capacity, would it have deterred me from courting Jess more than the suspicion that he was a criminal? And how would the knowledge acquired then have affected later events? Probably not at all.

In fact, it slowly came to me that Bunthorne's

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being a government official did not solve the mystery in the least. It deepened it. The solution was as far off as ever!

As I sat there on the cot, brooding, I seemed to hear David Millard repeating in his soft voice the lines he had quoted that day at the waterside public house:

For only blood can wipe out blood,
And only tears can heal:
And the crimson stain that was of Cain
Became Christ's snow-white seal.

Oh, the hypocrite! The shuffling, flat-footed, flabby-faced hypocrite!

The lines repeated themselves over and over in my tired brain. They carried little or no meaning or relevancy. I think it must have been their lilt and fluency; and how the neurasthenic mind seizes upon the like, even as the weary ear hears a chant of strange words in the monotonous throb of a ship's engines. They fascinated me, too, for they had been written by one who languished in a cell, even as I.

Alas! it is a fearful thing
To feel another's guilt.

I had read the "Ballad" some years before. The tragic horror of it had left a deep impression, a profound depression, upon me. I had bought the little book in curiosity and thrown it from me in shame not for him who wrote it, but that such things as he related could be. And now, from the nooks and

crannies of the subconscious, broken verses, whole couplets, and scattered fragments stole out and mocked at me.

But this I know, that every law
That men have made for man. . . .

How did it go?

But straws the wheat and saves the chaff
With a most evil fan.

The voice was the voice of Bunthorne, and now he was describing himself:

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk with fear and dread. . . .

I pulled myself together. That was not Wilde. It was Coleridge. Presently it interested me to note that their metre and matter were much alike. I drifted into parallels. I was too tired to care about the fitness of my mood. Quoth Coleridge:

About, about, in real and rout,
The death-fires danced at night.

Then came Wilde like an echo. (Aha! You thief!)

About, about, in ghostly rout,
They trod a saraband.

Some time later I started to my feet with my hands to my temples. I must stop this! That way lay madness!

When the doctor came next day he looked at me sharply. I had not slept. I had battled all night with Coleridge, Wilde, and Bunthorne, shutting the ears of my mind against their insistent lilting through the soft lips of the man at the Queen's Dock public house. Time and again I had started up, checking myself in the middle of a stanza and composing my brain to thoughts of green fields and streams in June. But no sooner was I again on the cot than a far voice began to recite very whisperingly—and the maddening rhymes would never fit:

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small,
*But I never knew a man who looked
So wistfully at the day.*

"Doctor," I said, baring my arm. "That hypodermic you spoke of—just enough to quiet me. I'm afraid I'm going mad."

"Surprised at you!" said he with gruff kindness. "I'll pump you full of it, if you really want me to. But look here! You're an innocent man."

"I am."

"Well, if you are—keep your wits. Besides, you'd like to face the music like a gentleman, wouldn't you?"

He unrolled my sleeve, buttoned the cuff, gave me a quick, firm handshake and marched out of the cell.

His refusal did me good. His call to me as man to man did more. I slept that night, and I could not remember a line of "Reading Gaol" or the "Ancient Mariner," even when, out of curiosity, I tried to.

Only two days left. No word from Alexander Lowndes. No sign, of course, of Daniel Bunthorne. I did not expect any from the latter.

Perhaps Lowndes was in Edinburgh, or London, with the Home Secretary for Scotland. Perhaps he was again on the track of Bunthorne. It was possible—yes, probable—that he had met defeat at every turn and had not the heart to bring me the news that all hope was gone.

I blessed him for that. I knew, at least, that wherever he was, or how engaged, he was doing his best. So long as he was absent, there was a chance. While there was still life, there was still a ray of hope.

The doctor was very friendly, the chaplain a bore. . . .

To-morrow morning at eight o'clock!

A peculiar apathy had settled down upon me. I cared little now whether reprieve came or not. I had counted the hours and discounted the passing minutes so accurately that I could hardly conceive of my calculations being upset. In fourteen hours and seven minutes it would be over—the mystery solved, the solution gained.

I was as one rushing in a light canoe through the rapids of time. The safety point was long past. The roar of the falls was in my ears, ever coming nearer, ever growing louder. None could save me now.

But it was a new experience. None had passed these rapids and lived to tell the tale. I would make

the best of my situation. I could sit back in my canoe and admire the scenery and study my every sensation as I was driven to death.

I did this. My cot was my canoe. I fell asleep, and my dreams were not unpleasant.

When I awoke, dawn was breaking—the dawn of judgment day.

The prison was very silent. My own clothes, those that I had worn when I was brought to the prison, neatly folded beside my cot.

My first visitor was a warder. He asked what I might want for breakfast.

"I didn't ring," I said, somehow amused at this innovation. "But if you will bring me black coffee, muffins and bacon and eggs, I'll be infinitely obliged."

I dressed myself and presently "received" the chaplain. Was there anything he could do?

"Thank you, no," I said. "The rest is between me and One who understands. But"—I could not resist it—"you ought really to study Genesis four-fifteen, Mr. Knox."

At seven o'clock I had breakfast. As I ate, I thought of my father and mother. I choked over the food. Then I resolutely finished the meal.

I thought of Jess for a little while. I hated her father, but I had brought myself to this pass for her sake—at least, in a great measure. I would have liked her to know it. It is but human that I should have felt this wish. I had grown to love her more while in prison—perhaps because I could not even see her, perhaps because Love thrives on sacrifice

for the beloved's sake. In imagination, I took her in my arms and kissed her quietly upon the brow. That was all.

At half-past seven the doctor came in.

"How do you feel?" he asked, offering me his friendly hand.

"All right. A little dazed, perhaps—not fully realizing. But I'll go through it all right—'like a gentleman.'"

He nodded. There were tears in his eyes.

"There's the needle, if you like."

"I wouldn't like."

"Thought you wouldn't. I'll—be there."

He turned his back abruptly and went out, muttering something about "barbarism."

The next fifteen minutes were the worst in my life. There was another condemned man in the "row." He was talking softly—praying, I think. Poor devil! He suffered more than I did. I was confronted by a physical fact. He was still in the horrors of mental prospect. It was as if they brought him to the gibbet *twice*.

Suddenly a deep boom vibrated through the stillness. It echoed through the corridor and reëchoed in the drums of my ears. There was a pause—half a minute perhaps. Then the same note again—frozen sound stabbing soundlessness.

The prison bell was tolling.

The quiet tread of many feet. I instinctively arose and faced the door. It was opened. There entered two or three warders, the governor of the

prison, the chaplain, Doctor Dixon, the prison surgeon, and a man in plain clothes whom I had never seen before.

The governor cleared his throat and read the death warrant. I kept my eyes upon Doctor Dixon's face. His gaze never left mine. The prison bell punctuated the governor's reading.

When he had finished the man in plain clothes made a signal to someone in the corridor. A figure entered swiftly and stood beside me. I knew it was the executioner, but I did not look at him, continuing to draw moral courage from Dixon's steady eyes.

The executioner slipped a thong around my body, enclosing my arms at the elbows. He worked swiftly. A second pinion bound my wrists to my sides. He fumbled over the third thong, which came around my arms over the biceps.

Then curiosity got the better of me. I suddenly realized that this man was the sinister "Mr. Jeremy," whose first name no man ever knew, upon whose face few had ever been "privileged" to look, whose comings and goings were more guarded than even the King's.

Then—but not before he had fastened the last thong and was swiftly retiring from the cell—I straightened up stiff in my bonds, as if I had received a bolt of electricity into my body.

I had caught a glimpse of his face, despite his efforts to keep it averted.

Mr. Jeremy, the public executioner, was Jess's father—*Daniel Bunthorne*!

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE DROP

NO MERE words are of avail to describe my feelings. I can only set down the astounding truth. Daniel Bunthorne was the hangman!

"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out," the chaplain was intoning.

I suddenly recovered use of the faculties that had been temporarily paralyzed.

"Wait!" I interrupted, shaking off the warders' hands from my shoulders.

"I did not commit the crime!" I cried. "The real murderer has just left this cell!"

"Sssh!" the warders cautioned, taking a firmer grip upon me.

The governor did not turn a hair, nor did any one else. Apparently the officials were accustomed to desperate utterances at this stage of the gloomy ceremony. Doctor Dixon tapped me on the breast with a single forefinger. The look on his face—and his alone—was of great anxiety and sympathy.

"Be a man," his eyes said, as plainly as his tongue could have uttered the words.

"It's all right, doctor," I said, "except——"

"You will presently be afforded an opportunity

to make any statement you wish," said the governor, coldly. He gave a signal and the warders pressed me toward the door, while the chaplain resumed his reading of the order for the burial of the dead.

Then I saw the situation. They—even Doctor Dixon—believed that I was not responsible for my words, that my nerve had given way, that my sanity had yielded before the strain of the occasion. They had seen many cases like mine.

I might cry out at the pitch of my voice. It would help me none. I might accuse the governor himself, or the chaplain, of being the murderer of Byrnes. Would any one be surprised? A man who could accuse his executioner might develop any sort of hallucination. I was obviously unbalanced.

The moment I saw and understood this, I think I laughed—just a little, dry laugh—and again fell into that strange apathy. No—not apathy. Rather I seemed to cease to be attached to myself. I was no longer in the centre of the stage, but watching the play from a remote seat in the audience.

Yet behind my outward calm as I marched in that procession of death there was a brain madly awirl.

Bunthorne was the public executioner! Ye gods! Bunthorne was the deputy sheriff—the sheriff's deputy—the instrument appointed by the law to wreak its vengeance upon Scotland's murderers! Bunthorne, himself twice a murderer, was to execute me for a crime that he had committed himself!

Bunthorne was the notorious Mr. Jeremy, the public executioner, Bunthorne! . . . *Bunthorne!*
. . . BUNTHORNE!!!

It was only a few steps from my cell to the corridor, only a turn to the right and a few steps beyond an open door to the scaffold. But it seemed as if I walked many miles and through many hours so rapidly and numerously came my thoughts, so all-embracing was their nature; and through all the mental kaleidoscope the prison bell uttered an intermittent groan of irony.

Bunthorne was Jeremy, the public hangman. That explained everything—at last! Fool that I was! How had I never suspected it? Had there not been many a hint, many a suggestion, that pointed to this fact as the only possible solution of the mystery?

No wonder the police had laughed at Lowndes. Charging the public hangman with a crime for which he would presently be called upon to execute the law's sentence! No wonder the Home Secretary had treated my tale as an absurdity!

Bunthorne was the public hangman. He was the Cain who slew his brother Abel. He was the Judas of mankind, and he took his thirty pieces of silver for each betrayal!

I could see now the solution of many mysteries—of the life that Bunthorne lived and was forced to make his daughter live; of the many movings of his domicile; of the false beard under my father's stoop; of the clergyman who surprised Jess that day in the lobby, long ago; of the identification that Bunthorne feared; of the knowledge that Byrnes in some way discovered and kept to himself in consideration of a share of the hangman's blood-money.

Everything was clear, and clearest of all—clearer even than why the authorities protected the man—was the answer to the mysterious manner of Byrnes's death. Who better than the hangman knew how to dislocate a man's neck in the quickest, most fatal way and with the least possible violence? By the nine gods! He had had practice enough, forsooth! None knew better than he the vulnerable spot in the human mechanism.

And now I knew the price Bunthorne had paid for his freedom from prison. Yet I seemed to hear again, like a plea of justification, his cry to the black-mailer in the park:

"I am an honest man. I wasn't bad at heart. If they hadn't got me they'd have got someone else. But it meant freedom with my little daughter. She was all I had."

Was it, after all, for Jess's sake? I remembered how he had said life held no charm for him, how he wished Jess were dead, and he back in the silences of the cell. Was it, after all, for Jess's protection that he had killed Byrnes? Was it to keep Jess's name unsullied that he would now cover his crime, sacrifice his own peace, his conscience, his soul—and my life?

For only blood can wash out blood,
And only tears can heal.

If it was all for Jess, then he was an amazing human being, something either hideously callous or remorselessly primitive in his affections. No cave man could ever have defended his home with less ruth for the enemy.

But it was too late to consider such questions now. I was the sacrifice, sealed, bound, and delivered. Bunthorne was the high priest and executioner. These things just flitted in and out of the whirling mental kaleidoscope, and the accompaniment was the stabbing sound-pang of the tolling bell, the steady footfall of the procession, and the drone of the chaplain:

"For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain."

The scaffold was before me. Up the steps I went, as helpless in the clutches of the law, as bound by the mesh of circumstance, as my arms by Jeremy's pinioning.

Now I was under the shadow of the gibbet. I stood on the drop. The rope swayed close to my face. The bell jarred the air with a mocking hoarseness. The doctor, pretending to feel my pulse, pressed my hand.

"Like a gentleman!" he whispered.

The chaplain paused. The governor spoke.

"John Sheffield. Is there anything you desire to say before you pass to eternity?"

"Nothing," I said, and my voice was quite clear, "except to repeat that I am innocent and that the real murderer is the man who would draw the bolt that will launch me into eternity."

They seemed not to hear me, none of them except Doctor Dixon. Again that pained look came into his eyes. I turned away in despair. Even he!

"What's the use!" I think I exclaimed.

At the same moment a pair of hands reached from

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behind and a white cap was drawn down over my eyes. The light of the world was shut out.

The chaplain resumed his intoning. The prison bell tolled. Something encircled my throat.

Now !

There was a pause in eternity. I think it no shame to say that my muscles stiffened, then slackened and became numb. A heavy sweat broke out upon me. My knees quivered and I could hardly stand. I set my jaws together and tried to remember.

“Like a gentleman!”

Suddenly a new sound shocked the comparative stillness—a high, loud, brazen jar.

It was the prison clock striking the hour of eight!

One !

Before the eighth stroke of that bell I should be no more.

Two !

“*Oh, spare me a little longer that I may recover my strength,*” the chaplain read, “*before I go hence and be no more seen.*”

Three !

Bunthorne! . . . Ye gods! . . . What would Jess do when she knew—as she must—some day?

Four !

Was he waiting for the last stroke? The fiend! Not satisfied, was he lingering over the climax of his work?

Five !

Only to see his face for a moment. Perhaps he was grinning. No—not that! He was human, at least.

Suppose he were sincere—for Jess's sake? God help the man's tortured soul in this hour if that were the truth!

Six !

A foolish rhyme flashed into my mind:

There was a little girl and she had a little curl

Right in the middle of her forehead.

When she was good——

Seven !

But one more stroke! *Now* the moment was actually upon me. *Now* it *must* be!

My heart gave a great leap and its beat seemed to thicken and become stuck. My knees shook and a great nausea seized me!

Why didn't he pull the bolt? *Strike*, bell! *Pull*, Bunthorne! Pity of Christ! Have done with it!!

EIGHT !!

I heard the stroke. It was a million miles away. It mingled with a dull thud somewhere near me.

A great flash of crimson enveloped the world!

Then the earth was as it had been in the beginning—without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep!

CHAPTER XIX

SILENCE OR SERVITUDE

IF I was indeed dead, the place where I next found myself was either a very pleasant hell or a very material heaven. I was in a comfortable bed.

Doctor Dixon sat beside me. As I opened my eyes and saw him I wondered how and when *he* had died. The doctor's face was very pale and his eyes glowed with an unnatural excitement. When he perceived that I was conscious, he seemed relieved.

"So there you are!" said he. "You've lain there like a log for five hours, yet with a heart as steady as a clock-tick."

"What happened?" I asked, dazedly.

"Only one of those things science doesn't understand as yet. You became unconscious. Your last impression was that you were dead. As a result, you lay there in the grip of a subconscious idea and——"

"Never mind that!" I interrupted. "What are you doing here? Are you alive or dead? Am I? What has happened?"

"What hasn't? There's been the very devil to pay."

Doctor Dixon leaned forward and felt my pulse.

"Right as my watch," said he. "Sit up. 'Twill clear your head."

I did as he commanded and presently felt none the worse for my long unconsciousness.

"Now tell me what happened," I repeated. Somehow I felt that the worst of my trials was over, that I had satisfied justice and had a right to ask questions.

"A lot of things happened," said the doctor. "First, you fainted. Then the executioner failed his job and the Home Secretary got in on the game before the sheriff could get a substitute to draw the bolt."

"I'd like some details," I said.

"Well, you fainted. That's plain enough. They always do when they aren't hopelessly callous or haven't been helped with the needle. You would have dislocated your own neck if it hadn't been for the spare rope to allow for a seven-foot drop.

"Next. The bolt was never drawn. You never left the drop until you were carried off. At the last stroke of eight everything seemed to have gone wrong with the arrangements. The drop didn't budge, although there came a thud from the vicinity of the mechanism. The governor turned the colour of oatmeal and swore, while the assistant chief warder went to investigate.

"Next minute there was a call for me. Jeremy, the public executioner, was lying in a fit beside his mechanism!"

"Ah!" I said, somewhat awestricken. It was like the Hand of God. "That was the fall I heard."

Doctor Dixon looked keenly at me. No doubt he saw my agitation.

"Look here!" said he, his face suddenly clearing. "What was that bosh you were saying before——?"

"Don't!" I interrupted. "Don't ask me anything just now. Tell me what else happened."

"Jeremy was in bad shape. You were still lying on the drop. The sheriff was for appointing a convict as deputy *pro tem* to draw the bolt.

"In the meantime, I suppose, the rabble in the street was waiting to see the black flag go up. It didn't. No notice of death was ever signed by me or posted on the prison gates. By this time all Glasgow knows that something went wrong.

"But there was no more talk about finishing the job when the governor's clerk rushed in with word that the Home Secretary had arrived and was in the private office. He had issued a stay of execution, so orders were given for your removal to the hospital ward.

"That's all I know about it, except that everybody's up in the air. The old man looks as if a rich aunt had died and left him nothing and there are all sorts of doings in the private office, I understand. They've been asking every five minutes if you've recovered——"

Doctor Dixon stopped as a young man, the governor's clerk, appeared in the sick ward. It was another inquiry about my condition.

"It all depends!" snorted the doctor. "If they want to hand him a reprieve, I say he is as fit as a fiddle. If they want to do some more cold-blooded

bungling, say for me that John Sheffield is too ill to be moved at this time."

The clerk smiled and said things "looked promising" and that the Home Secretary and the governor were anxious to have an interview as soon as I was able to go to the office. Doctor Dixon frowned then glanced quickly at me.

"Get up, you confounded malingerer!" said he. "Go and see what terms they offer—or want."

I felt perfectly well and quite optimistic a few minutes after I got on my feet. I was still dressed as I had been when I went to the scaffold, except for my coat, which was quickly found and put on. Then I went with Doctor Dixon and the clerk to the governor's office.

I found three persons awaiting me there—the governor, who looked as if he had been seeing ghosts, a quiet, shrewd-faced man whom I took to be the Home Secretary; and the third man was an elderly spectacled person who greeted me with an encouraging smile. It was Alexander Lowndes.

The governor, at a whispered word from the Home Secretary, requested his clerk and Doctor Dixon to leave the room. Then the Home Secretary himself addressed me.

"John Sheffield," said he, "I do not know your real name, which is perhaps just as well. I do know, however, that you are an innocent man and that you have suffered almost more than the death from which you have so providentially escaped.

"I am now in possession of all the facts in this case. I know as well as you do who committed the murder

for which you were convicted. He has confessed it at the point of death in order that you might not be sent to the gallows a second time."

He looked across the table at me, as if to gauge me physically and morally.

"I will speak frankly, my man," he continued. "I understand that you also know who and what the actual murderer is—officially. You saw him this morning. You protested your innocence. You will no doubt have appreciated by this time how incredible your charge sounded to the officials of this prison, who are concerned, not with the guilt or innocence of a condemned man, but with the execution of the law's judgments.

"John Sheffield, I have here among other documents a reprieve of the death sentence which I am prepared to sign. You will presently receive the King's pardon and go forth a free man—on certain conditions."

It seemed rather odd to me that the law, in admitting its blunder, should attach any conditions to the granting of my freedom. But I only asked what the conditions might be.

"That you leave the United Kingdom at once," said the Home Secretary, pointedly, "and keep silence!"

"The alternative?" I felt the ground becoming firmer under my feet.

"The alternative," said the Home Secretary, frowning. "Is it really necessary for me to name the alternative? I should think your gratitude——"

"What have I to be grateful for to you or the

government?" I suddenly burst out. Then, checking myself after a warning look from Alexander Lowndes, I said in a quieter tone: "I should at least like to hear the alternative."

The Home Secretary seemed annoyed. He took up a pen and made an invisible dry-point etching on the table before him. The governor sat rigidly, and his face was whiter than ever. I glanced at Lowndes. The old lawyer's face expressed approval of my stand but fear for my handling of the situation.

"Sheffield," said the Home Secretary in a sudden confidential way, "I see that you are a man of intelligence. I will be even more open with you."

He leaned forward, fixing his eyes upon mine and emphasizing his words with the pen point.

"You know as well as I do that a serious miscarriage of justice has occurred, through no fault of the law but by a chain of unusual circumstances which were partly brought about by your own attitude. As a man of education, you must know as well as I do that, if the law shall stand, the law must maintain its dignity at any cost—at *any cost*."

"To its dignity," I said to myself, foreseeing what was coming.

"To-day," the Home Secretary continued, "the city of Glasgow and a goodly part of Scotland are, or will be, aware that there was a hitch in the hanging of John Sheffield, that the black flag was not hoisted upon the prison walls, although the bell tolled, that no death notice was posted on the prison gates, that Mr. Jeremy, the public executioner, failed for

some reason to do his duty, that, in short, John Sheffield was not hanged at all.

"The people will demand an explanation of these things, Mr. Sheffield. What explanation is the government in a position to give?"

"In view of the fact that the opposition in parliament is, and has been for some time, raising as an issue the abolishment of capital punishment, can the government afford to state that the public executioner himself committed the crime for which you were to have been hanged, that the public executioner came to the prison to hang you for this crime, and that, human nature rebelling against such an enormity, he fell unconscious as his hand reached to the bolt?"

"Can we tell this to the people, Mr. Sheffield? You must see that we cannot. There would be a revolution in public sentiment that would hurl the present government out of power, stir up the criminal classes and the sympathetic masses, and arouse a disastrous enmity to the police and the law.

"The principal condition upon which you leave this prison a free man, Sheffield, is your silence upon what has taken place. For the rest, shave off that beard and resume the honourable name and station which Mr. Lowndes assures me is yours. Or you may go to the colonies—say, Canada—and enjoy there what the government will award you privately as compensation, but publicly as for services rendered.

"Canada, my dear Mr. Sheffield," added the Home Secretary with a smile, "has magnificent opportunities for loyal subjects of the King."

"And the alternative?" I persisted.

Again the Home Secretary frowned. Evidently he had hoped to avoid this issue.

"The alternative," he said, slowly, "is simply this: For the sake of the law's dignity and to preserve the respect due its ancient processes, your sentence will be commuted to *life servitude*."

"Life servitude for a crime of which you know me to be guiltless!" I cried.

The Home Secretary shrugged his shoulders.

"I am sorry, Sheffield. Greater men than you have been sacrificed to governmental necessities."

There was silence. I was aware that the three men were watching me keenly, particularly Mr. Lowndes. The old lawyer was straining forward in his chair.

"Perhaps," said the Home Secretary, presently, "it would be as well to let you have time to think it over—to make your final decision, your final choice."

"I can state it now," I said, my blood boiling in my veins. "I refuse to trade either with you or the government in this matter. If I accept my freedom and compensation, both will be my due. I will not thank the government for its 'generosity,' neither shall I accept anything with a single condition attached to it. In fact, I demand an apology from the government, along with unconditional freedom and compensation!"

The governor and Alexander Lowndes stirred in their seats, I thought from the appearance of Mr. Lowndes's face that he heartily approved my attitude. The Home Secretary, however, never turned a hair.

"You forget the alternative, Mr. Sheffield," said he, coldly.

"Not for a minute. And not for a minute will I consider it. I dare you, sir, or the government you represent, to carry that alternative into practice. Place me in solitary confinement for life—and I see it is in your power to do it—but you will not have succeeded in your aim. You will have succeeded in antagonizing me further against the law's injustice. You will have placed me in a tomb of silence, *but*"—I pointed straight across the room at Alexander Lowndes—"unless you place *him* in prison, too—and that I defy you to do!—you will have left my tongue and my secret in a man whose word commands respect from Gretna Green to John o'Groat's!"

The Home Secretary sprang to his feet with an exclamation of profane exasperation. He walked around the table and faced me within reach of my arm. It was a battle of eyes and will. I did not yield by the quiver of an eyelash.

"Sheffield," said he, "we must come to terms. Your common sense must tell you that!"

"Of course it does!" I cried. "You could come to terms quickly enough if you would refrain from approaching a decent man with a bribe in one hand and a bludgeon in the other. Do you suppose for a single second that I am proud of my connection with this affair, that I would care to shout it from the housetops of Glasgow? I wish to forget, though heaven knows I never can, nor will! All I want is the apology that lies in fair dealing, the acknowledge-

ment of error that lies in reparation. I care not a snap for your 'compensation' on one side and your threats on the other!"

The Home Secretary stared at me.

"By heaven! Sheffield, do you mean that? Can the government trust you?"

"I mean it—yes. And the government will *have* to trust me or take the consequences."

His face suddenly cleared. He laughed in an odd manner and returned to the table. He dipped the pen in ink and dashed his signature across the bottom of one of the documents that had been lying there.

"John Sheffield," said he, "this document, signed by me as Home Secretary for Scotland, states that your sentence has been commuted to life servitude."

I seemed to have lost, but I nodded defiantly. The Home Secretary smiled.

"This is for the public," said he. "John Sheffield will die in prison, if he is not forgotten in six months. As for you, whoever you really are, I understand you have been abroad. You return to Scotland to-day. Let me be the first to welcome you back to your native land. Let me also suggest that before you leave prison you interview the barber and abandon your *aliases*."

It was a second or two before I realized the significance of his words.

"You mean—without—conditions?" I stammered.

"Without conditions. I see that you will be discreet. I overlooked that you are a gentleman. But remember, you are entitled to compensation. I would advise that you take it.

"For the rest," his manner was miraculously changed, "I trust your common sense and refined discretion. Whatever you do," and he became almost laughably grave, "let parliament die a natural death. Leave us, at least, a chance for reflection."

He made a sign to the governor, who quietly left the room. He returned presently, not with the prison barber, but with a razor, a strop, a shaving mug and brush and a cake of soap.

"On second thought," said the governor with a gravity laughably equal to the Home Secretary's, "it might be better if he could shave himself—in here, you know."

Then followed an odd scene. I, who had that morning stood upon the scaffold and a minute before had done battle with a statesman, sat in the governor's chair before a small hand-mirror, lathering my face with soap and shaving away a hard beard, while the governor of his majesty's prison, the Home Secretary for Scotland, and honest old Sandy Lowndes sat around me, gravely watching soap-suds and hair depart from my chin.

With the help of the governor I was supplied with fresh linen and other small necessities of decency. When everything was done, I stood up, my father's son, and Lowndes introduced me by my own name.

"The government will be anxious—that is, interested to hear your plans as soon as they are made," said the Home Secretary, shaking my hand. "But, really, I think," he added, pointedly, "that you ought to go to Canada. I have authority to state that you own some property there."

"I shall think it over," I said.

"Leave Doctor Dixon to me," said the governor when I evinced a desire to bid the kindly little surgeon good-bye. "Dixon knows much already and will quite understand your going without much open ceremony."

Five minutes later I was out under God's sunshine. The dingy old city of Glasgow looked like Paradise to me. Mr. Lowndes hailed the first cab we sighted. I did not wish to enter it. Anything in the nature of confinement was distasteful in that hour.

"But this business is not finished yet, John," said the old gentleman, gravely, as he urged me into the cab.

Then I remembered. I came to earth and a realization of material things. I poured a volley of questions into Lowndes's ear.

"Wait," said he, patiently. "Ye'll learn everything presently."

"But how did it come about? I know you saved me in some way, but——"

"I didn't save you," said Lowndes with a solemn, dogged emphasis.

"Who did, then?"

"A little lass by the name of Jess Bunthorne. She sacrificed everything, John—for you!"

CHAPTER XX

WATCHING THE HOUR-GLASS

JESS had saved me. Jess had sacrificed everything—for me!

“Tell me,” was all I could say.

As the cab rolled through the streets of Glasgow, bound I knew not where, the old lawyer told me the story.

He had given up all hope of assistance from the police, the Home Secretary, or Bunthorne himself. His last resort was Jess, if he could find her.

He had worked hard to this end, at first without the slightest clue to the Bunthornes' whereabouts. It was not until the afternoon before the day set for my execution that he discovered a lead. Even then he was not sure that he was upon the right track until he knocked at a door in a tenement house in the city of Paisley and said—stated, rather—to the young woman who opened it:

“You are Jess Bunthorne. I come from a friend of yours—Jack Sheffield.”

Her reception of the stranger was not what might have been expected at the Bunthorne home, but Jess's father had gone away—“on business.”

“She's a nice lass,” said Lowndes. “I can understand what ye did now—and why. I fell in love wi’

her myself, just for the sweet honesty of the lass; and it hurt me sair to tell her what I had to."

He had told her everything he knew, except that it was certain her father had killed Byrnes and that I had seen him do it. But when she heard that I was in prison and that I was to die for the murder of Byrnes at eight o'clock next morning, her distress was terrible to witness.

"She stared at me like a woman that is *fey*," said Lowndes, "and all at once she burst out in the most distressful weeping.

"I'm not going to tell you everything, John. It was just as you can imagine, and more. The truth came to her mind like a flash, but the proofs more slowly. She hadna seen you since that night. She thought ye had gone back to your people, disgusted, maybe, at what she supposed ye might have overheard in the park that night. But when she knew ye were in prison, and what for, she said it couldn't be you that killed Byrnes. She would not believe it was her father, either, at first. But by and by she spoke of how he came home that night from the meeting in the park, white as a sheet, she said, and shaking as if he had palsy. And she told me of his behaviour in the following days, wandering about the house all day, mutternng and wringing his hands, starting at every sound, stealing out at night to buy the newspapers which he would bring back under his coat, read behind locked doors, then burn in the kitchen range.

"Once the police came to the house and were in the room with her father for a little while. They

asked no questions of Jess, but after they went away, she said, her father dropped into a chair and sobbed like a child."

"The poor devil!" I said. I could afford now to be generous, and the picture of Bunthorne's agony moved me. I thought I understood its nature.

"So, you see," Lowndes continued, "as Jess told me these things, the truth became proof in her mind. It was easy to see how her thought was running. Now that she knew Byrnes was dead and you in prison for the killing, she saw that her father *must* know something about it, and his conduct since that night suggested much more.

"'Mr. Lowndes,' said she at last, and, as I say, she looked *fey*, 'it was my own father who killed the man.'

"I just nodded my head. There was no need to do more. She had arrived at the fact of the matter for herself. Then she grew very hard and asked all sorts of questions about you. I told her about the trial and how you refused to reveal the name of the man you had seen kill Byrnes.

"'Why did Jack Sheffield do this?' she demanded of me.

"'I suppose because he was your father, Jess,' I said.

"She did not understand any more than I did just then why Bunthorne had acted as he had. She was like a little fury over that. It hurt her sore, I could see, because he was her father, but that didn't keep her from seeing him as a coward trying to save his own neck at the expense of yours. Even if she hadn't cared for you, John, I think that lass would

have acted just as she did. She told me everything she knew about Byrnes and her father and you, everything she knew about the movements of all of you on that particular night.

"It was enough, John, more than enough to reopen the case, and she said, come what might of it, she would stand by the truth. She would never have betrayed her father for the murder of Byrnes or for any other crime on the calendar, but this thing of letting a man go to the gallows—putting aside that it was you—made a fair cockatrice o' the lass. She seemed ashamed of the very blood in her veins, though from the colour of her face there wasna much o' any sort.

"'Never mind my father. Never mind me,' she said. 'Save Jack Sheffield! But, oh! let him never look upon my face. 'Twould kill me wi' shame!'

"So there we were. She had no idea where her father had gone, or how or where to find him. She had no idea what his 'business' was. There was nothing for it but to make another appeal to the Home Secretary.

"'Will ye come with me, Miss Jess?' I asked.

"'I will do exactly what ye bid me,' said she, and she just put on her bonnet then and there.

"We went out together. I telegraphed the Home Secretary in London as from my Glasgow offices, telling him that I had absolute proofs of your innocence. I was stretching things a bit, John, in order to get a stay of execution. Then Jess and I came to Glasgow, where I expected to find a reply waiting me. There was none. I telegraphed again

and got back word that my first message had been forwarded to the Home Secretary, who has *even then in Glasgow!*

"Here was a bit of luck! It was then ten o'clock at night. Most likely the Home Secretary had my telegram by now. Maybe he had already taken action. We waited in my office. Jess would not hear of leaving, and I had decided not to sleep, even if I sat there all night. I might be called at any hour of the night to produce my proofs before a stay was granted, and every hour was precious.

"So we remained in the office all last night, John. The brave lass never closed her eyes. She sat there, staring at the wall, her hands crossed in her lap, bonnie as a picture, but my! she was ghostlike.

"When morning came I got the prison governor on the telephone, expecting to hear the stay had been received. But no! Not a word! The execution was to take place in little less than an hour. The Home Secretary had done nothing!

"John, I never want to live the next hour over again this side o' the place of eternal torture. The man was in Glasgow, mind ye!—the one man that had power to stop or postpone that hanging. He might as well have been in the wilds of Africa for all I knew exactly where to find him.

"Think of it, John! I know what you were going through, but ye suffered no more than I did. There was a man's life in my hands. I called the police. I called clubs and hotels. I did everything my scattered wits suggested to find that man. At last—and it wanted but half an hour of eight o'clock—I

dropped the telephone on the desk with a clatter. I was done. I could think of no other way of reaching the Home Secretary. He was lost like a needle in a haystack. My hands had no nerves in them to hold the telephone. I put doon my heid, John, and cried—ay, Johnnie, lad—I greeted like a bairn!”

“God bless you, Uncle Sandy!” I gulped.

“And that lass, John! What did she do but put her arms around my shoulders and soothe me, forgetting everything but that I was in need o’ encouragement.

“‘It’ll come right!’ she said, and ye would ha’ thought she had the second sight. ‘It’ll come right!’

“And at that very instant the telephone gave a buzz. It was Jess who grabbed it.

“‘Mr. Lowndes,’ says she, turning to me with a kind o’ queer laugh. *‘The Home Secretary for Scotland would speak to ye!’*

“John, my lad, don’t tell me that God’s not still in His heaven. It was then twenty-five minutes to eight o’clock. The telegram had been forwarded to Glasgow right enough, but through some thickheadedness or because of the late hour it had not been delivered to the man until his valet took up his coffee this morning! Yet there were still a good twenty minutes to work in!

“The Home Secretary was furious, first at me, then because the telegram had come late. He hardly knew what to do. I couldna plead my case over a telephone. I had to *show* him my proofs. He couldna stay the execution after having already dismissed my plea until he *saw* my proofs.

"Wait!" I yelled into that telephone, without much respect for persons. 'Jump into your clothes, man! Be ready to get into a cab in five minutes. I'll bring the proofs along wi' me!'

"Then I bashed that telephone on the floor, grabbed my hat, grabbed Jess, and we tumbled doon that stair and into the street in a jiffy.

"There was not a cab in sight—nothing but a milkcart. I jumped into it and hauled Jess up after me. The milkman thought we were crazy, but I tell't him a man's life was at stake and showed him twa sovereigns—ay, sir, twa sovereigns! Next minute that auld milkcart was banging along Argyll Street, the barrels and cans clatterin' behind us and the milk splashin' and white-washin' the street. We were making for St. Enoch's Square where the Home Secretary was stopping.

"There were plenty o' cabs there, and the Home Secretary—guld man!—was waiting for us.

"What's all this? Where are your proofs? Ye have only seven minutes!' says he, excited-like, for that milkcart looked like being in dead earnest.

"Get in!' says I, whistling a cab, and to the driver I says: *'Duke Street jail an' drive like blue bleezes!'*

"The minute we were off I began to unload my tale. He seemed impressed when I repeated Jess's story.

"And who is the young woman, pray?' says he.

"She's Bunthorne's daughter!' says I.

"Bunthorne's daughter!' says he, staring at her in a way I didn't understand then. *'Good God!'*

"Then he pulled out his watch. It was one minute

to eight! But there was no use stopping to telephone. The delay in getting the governor to the instrument would be fatal. Besides, we were already in Duke Street. We could see the crowd and the pole by the wall. The black flag was not up. There was still time!

"The clock was just striking eight as we pulled the doorbell of the prison. The Home Secretary made short work of identifying himself. The governor's room was empty except for the clerk.

"Stop the execution—quick!" cried the Home Secretary.

"The clerk bolted. Then we three sat down and breathed hard. We were too late. The last stroke of the hour had gone.

"But you know, John, that though we were a few seconds too late ordinarily, the good Lord had stretched out His hand. The governor came hurrying in. His face was like a dead man's.

"Ye know the rest. There had been a hitch. Ye were safe. Even as the governor explained, a couple of warders came into the private office, carrying the public executioner by the head and feet.

"They laid him on a sofa and Jess saw his face——"

"Then," I gasped, "*she knows!*"

"Ay, John," said the old lawyer, sadly. "She kens everything."

CHAPTER XXI

DEATH, LOVE, AND LIFE

THE cab suddenly stopped before a quiet building set back from a suburban road and enclosed in gardens.

"It's a private hospital," said Mr. Lowndes, getting out. "Now be careful what you say, John. It's only right that you should see him. And he said he wanted to see you. But Mr. Bunthorne is a Mr. Forrest here. You understand that he was taken ill in the city this morning and brought here by friends."

I understood.

We entered the private office of the institution and Lowndes asked about the patient's condition.

"He is no better," said the nurse in charge. "His daughter is with him now. She has not left his side since she arrived here with him at nine o'clock."

"She is here!" I said, quickly.

The nurse, who had just explicitly stated that she was, bowed gravely, but with a curious glance at me.

"Will he live?" asked Lowndes.

The nurse shook her head.

A few minutes later we were escorted upstairs to the room where Daniel Bunthorne lay. I came to a halt in the open doorway for the space of a few

seconds and looked upon a memorable picture. Bunthorne lay with his pillowed head and shoulders facing me. Light from a western window fell upon his countenance. It seemed to me strangely radiant, though unnaturally pale and purified of all mental and physical pain, as if he had already left his unhappy life behind him.

By his head stood a physician and near him a nurse. On her knees by the middle of the bed knelt a figure in whom I at once recognized the woman I loved. One of her father's hands was held in both of hers. Her face was hidden in the counterpane, but on the man's there was a supreme peace.

"We are too late," whispered Lowndes at once. "But 'tis as well. He just wanted to thank you, John; to ask your pardon."

I saw a nurse disengage Jess's hands, raise her from the bedside, and whisper something in her ear.

Jess turned and saw Mr. Lowndes and me standing near the foot of the bed. A little light flickered in her eyes at sight of the kindly old lawyer, but when her gaze fell on me it was seemingly upon a perfect stranger. Only a moment did her gaze linger; then it turned away without a sign of recognition.

"Bonnie and ghostlike," as Lowndes had described her in her sorrow, she walked past me and out of the room.

Perhaps she did not recognize me, shaven as I was. Yet if she loved me, would not love's eyes have recognized me despite? And was I not with her tried and proven friend, Mr. Lowndes? Who else

could I be but that same Jack Sheffield whose lips had met hers that night in the park?

"Let her be a bit. Let her be," whispered Mr. Lowndes, pressing my arm.

Then I turned and looked again at the bed. At Jess's departure the nurse raised the half-drawn window blind. The late afternoon sun streamed generously in upon the still figure, touching it with a tender warmth, bathing it with a soft halo.

So Daniel Bunthorne's strange career was at an end. I stood there in silence, studying the face from which the lines of constant care had miraculously vanished. Gone was the hunted look, gone the sallow looseness of the features. Strength was evident in the jaw and inward repose over all.

I knew now what manner of man this had been—a giant of character, born of circumstances, yet otherwise just a plain man, wonderfully and fearfully human, asking nothing of life but the right to live, love, and enjoy a little share of peace and happiness within the four hired walls that he had called home.

His crimes had not been his own. In the beginning he had slain a man who had crossed the threshold of his four hired walls. The law had punished him for that which never need have occurred had the law been adequate to deal with the greater crime that was his first victim's. The law had freed him on condition that he be its official Cain, sending him forth with his own remorse for companion, "a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth," setting a mark upon his brow, a mark of protection as well as a

badge of his alienship, "lest any finding him should slay him."

I thought of what must have been this man's agony in the long days and nights of his isolation, an isolation made keener by his child's purity and innocence. No doubt and many a time he had cried, like Cain, unto his God:

"My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

The rest—the slaying of the blackmailer who knew his secret and would have traded upon it through his child—the proposed immolation of a scapegoat that his daughter might remain innocent and happy—were these the acts of a selfish criminal, or a self-torturing sacrifice to keep all that he possessed, all that he could ever hope to possess—four hired walls, his daughter's happiness and her love?

And now . . . I never saw such calm upon a human face. His death solved every problem, and he had known it and welcomed it. At this moment, perhaps, he was pleading his case before that Greater Tribunal where Justice is tempered with Mercy and Understanding.

I left that chamber of journey's ending a better, if humbler, man. I even felt that in some way I had been privileged—honoured—in sharing a part of that dead man's sorrow. I felt that Bunthorne had been my friend, and I his. I was proud that he had trusted me, and ashamed that I had ever doubted or thought to betray him.

Now that he was dead, his trust remained—a trust

for which he had suffered and died—the protection of Jess.

I sought her throughout the hospital. I wished only to say to her:

“I am here. I am free and I love you. Let me serve you.”

But I could not find her. I came upon Alexander Lowndes, who had left me to my own thoughts by that bedside. He was seated in an anteroom set aside for those who too often have occasion to wait through hours of suspense. The old lawyer’s eyes were filled with tears and he was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees.

“Where is Jess?” I asked.

“She’s gone,” said he.

“Gone! Gone where?—why?”

Alexander Lowndes arose to his feet and laid his hands upon my shoulders.

“It’s no use, John,” said he. “She loves ye truly, and for that very love she says she can never meet your eyes again. She asks ye to forgive her father and forget her.”

Jess was gone. Lowndes knew not where. She had not told him and ere he could ask her, there in the anteroom, he had looked up to discover that he was alone.

I did not give up hope of finding her, however. Whatever I might do in the future I was determined that Jess should share my lot if she were but willing to do so.

Mr. Lowndes and I attended the funeral of “Mr.

Forrest." It was a quiet affair, what is known as a "private interment." Besides ourselves and the sexton and his men there were but three persons present—Mr. Knox, the chaplain, who read the service; Doctor Dixon, who greeted me with a firm handclasp and a word of congratulation; and a stiff, upright man whose identity or official connection I never was able to establish. I only know that he was the "soldier man" of Jess's childhood.

Jess did not appear and none knew where she was, except possibly the "soldier man," and he was a person of very few words. He only shook his head when I ventured to ask about her.

Two days later I ascended the sandstone steps of my father's house. It was now early October and my parents had returned to the city. Two minutes later I was with my mother.

I leave my home-coming to the imagination. No question was raised about three months more or less in the prolonged absence of five years. The prodigal son had returned. That was enough.

"But," said I to my father, "though I have held on to my lucky sixpence, I have yet no right to remain at home, sir. I am not yet in a position to pay you back that five hundred pounds, although I daresay I am able to support myself after five years' practice."

"Hoot, toot, John," said my father, quickly. "Say nae mair aboot that. It's worth mair'n five hundred pounds to me to see the sober-minded man ye have become. We'll put the five hundred doon to education, Jock."

We discussed the future. I told him that I had an "option" on some land in Western Canada and thought of transferring the family destinies there.

My father's face fell slightly, then he nodded his head. I think now that he was so fearful of my lapsing backward that he was ready to accede to any plan of my own selection that would keep me in the road which he seemed to think I was successfully covering—the road of sober purpose.

"Your mother will be a bit disappointed," said he, "but I believe it's for the best. I will tell ye something I havena told her. The jute business is not what it was, John."

"The jute business!"

"Oh, I'm rich," said he; "richer than ever I was, but the future is not as promising as it might be for my successors. They're building manufactories in India and handling the raw material where it's grown. Cheap labour there is making a wheen o' difference."

"Besides, John, Scotland's nae mair the place for a young man o' enterprise. If we noble Britons have gotten oursel's an empire, Jock, why shouldna the young blood gang forth and occupy it?"

"Gang to Canada by all means, John. I hae aboot decided to leave business mysel' this year, and maybe your mother and me 'll tak' a bit holiday and come and see ye raisin' coos and sheep and fellin' trees. Wha kens but we might like it an' stay a bit!"

After this, I thought more seriously of the Home Secretary's offer. But I really cared little whether my future was to be in Scotland or in Canada. My

thoughts were mostly concerned with the woman who was to share it.

What had become of her? What *was* to become of her—a homeless, fatherless, unhappy lass? What might not have become of her already?

I read the papers assiduously, for a great fear had daily been growing upon me. But I found no hint of Jess either dead or alive.

One interesting item, which appeared a few days after my return home, related to the illness and death of Mr. Jeremy, the public executioner. The frequent recurrences of the parenthetic “it is said,” spoke volumes for the sphinx-like silence of the government upon such matters. It was said, for instance, “upon good authority,” that Mr. Jeremy had been stricken a few minutes before the time set for the execution of John Sheffield, *alias* “Captain Kettle,” best-known to the public as “Jack the Thumb-Killer.” In view of the fact that the convicted man had undergone practically all the agonies of the death sentence, the latter had been commuted to life servitude. It was also rumoured that it had been decided to abolish the hoisting of the black flag as a means of notifying the public that justice had been satisfied.

I smiled over this, suspecting that it was a means of preventing the public from knowing what had, or had not, been happening within prison walls. Certain it is that the black flag has not been hoisted since that time. It has become a curious relic of middle-age barbarism, like the headsman’s axe and the block. The gibbet remains, however.

About two weeks after my return to my people, I called upon Alexander Lowndes, seeking news of Jess. He shook his head, but bade me sit down.

"I have been thinking, John," said he, "that the government is kind o' set on your going to Canada. I've been thinking ye'd better go."

"Why?"

"Mind ye, I may be wrong, but I suspect that the government kens fine where Jess Bunthorne is. Ye mind yon soldier man that always kenned where to find her father? I think he's maybe a kind of aide to the Home Secretary's office. If anybody kens where Jess is to be found it would be him, I'm thinking. She had always a great respect for yon man, too, and if she has been seeking advice of anybody—and Lord knows she'll have been in need o' advice—she's been to him."

My heart lightened at Lowndes's air of certainty that Jess was at least alive.

"But why should she not come to *you* for advice? You and she were staunch enough allies."

Lowndes smiled.

"She's wanting ye that bad, John, that she's maybe afraid she'll get ye!" he chuckled.

"But frankly, lad," he added, gravely. "I think maybe the government has got Jess saved up somewhere and is just as anxious to see the last o' her as to hear the last o' you. They mean that ye shall go to Canada."

"Then I'll go," I said, "if it'll bring me any nearer Jess."

And that day I wrote my decision to the Home Secretary. I formally demanded "compensation."

Two weeks later I had said good-bye to my parents, with the promise on both sides of a speedy reunion. My father did not see me off, staying at home with my mother, at my request.

Mr. Lowndes came and brought me certain letters from the Home Secretary, letters which I was to present to certain officials at Ottawa. Uncle Sandy declared that he had not seen Jess, but patted me on the back and told me, with an air of great confidence, that everything would come right in the end.

He bade me good-bye as the "all-ashore" bell rang. The gangway was dropped and the Canadian liner edged away from the wharf, where the honest old lawyer stood smiling and waving a hand to me where I leaned by the rail.

All at once I noticed a familiar figure a little to the left of him. It singled itself from the usual crowd, came to the edge of the wharf, straightened up, and saluted someone upon the deck of the steamer.

Then I recognized Jess's "soldier man." I watched him, wondering. He turned toward Lowndes, even as the lawyer turned toward him. They walked without hesitation toward one another, shook hands, and laughed together. Then they both looked toward the steamer's deck and raised their hats. They were certainly not saluting me in this manner.

I started up and glanced along the deck.

There she was—Jess! She was wearing deep

mourning and waving a little handkerchief toward the two men on the wharf.

She did not see me, nor do I think she was aware of my presence on the ship, until I stood beside her and spoke her name. She turned quickly. Her face became very pale. Her eyes filled with a kind of shame and fell before my gaze.

Next moment she turned and ran to the companion. In a second I saw the whole design of a selfish but paternal government. With a last triumphant wave of my arm to the smiling men on the fast-receding wharf, I dove down the companion-way after Jess, nearly upsetting a steward who was coming upstairs.

I caught a glimpse of a little figure vanishing into the alley beyond the dining saloon. Hard on her heels I rushed, and saw her disappear into a cabin.

Careless of convention or anything else, I flung open the door and dashed in after her.

Jess had thrown herself upon a settee. Her face was buried in her arms and she was sobbing. I turned and slammed the cabin door shut. Heedless of her protestations, I gathered her up in my arms.

And in that moment I saw Canada rise before us
as a land of milk and honey!

THE END

SECRET



THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.



